

LotFP Weekly #11

January 1, 2002

2001 is now behind us, leaving its share of great music, bad music, a ton of average music, and tons of news items that changed the landscape of the scene.

This year's LotFP Awards have been expanded beyond just the Top 10 Albums of the Year, to a variety of categories. This year, there's just the editorial awards but in future years, once the circulation is higher, there will be another go at reader awards as well.

All awards are judged based on personal listening experience to full CDs. As of this writing (12/25), there are 151 full CDs laying around the LotFP office, there have been at least that many CDs I've gotten in the form of cardboard sleeve promos this year, and then factoring in trades and other such things, I think it is safe to say I've listened to at least 325 2001 albums in their entirety this year, so the awards are based on at least somewhat comprehensive listening. Just in metal, I'd estimate there were at least three or four times that number of albums released this year, maybe more, and looking at what a shot of luck it was to find my pick for Album of the Year, who knows what was out there that went unheard that would have rocked these awards. Also keep in mind that obviously not all of those CDs I did hear got frequent listening. I haven't listened heavily to the more insane extreme stuff this year, so I may very well be missing out when it comes to nominating drummers and extreme vocalists. Just thought I'd throw out a couple disclaimers before I go about lording over 2001 and telling everyone what ruled and what didn't.

Now, in order to build a little suspense as to winners, and to prevent annoying email from people who think I'm out of my mind for some of my picks (ok, fat chance on that one), here's a listing of the categories, and what criteria I use to determine the winners.

Note that there are no categories for specific types of metal such as 'best power metal album', 'best death metal album', etc. The main reason is there's just too much room for disagreement of what style a band is (is Children of Bodom a power metal band because of their music, or a death metal band because of their extreme vocals, or a black metal band because they use higher pitched extreme vocals with keyboard enhanced, very fast melodic music? Is Emperor a black metal band these days? There are arguments to be made for each one of those, yet arguments to be made that any of those categorizations are laughable. What category do Opeth or Borknagar go in? Is Symphony X a power metal band or a progressive metal band? Do I include 'Best Eastern European Band That Sounds like My Dying Bride in a Blender Who Can't Write a Coherent Song' as a category because there are bands like that springing up like weeds now and they just don't fit anywhere else?) and I just don't need the headache. It's also fast becoming true that the first indication that a band just isn't any good is that they neatly fit into a specific category. Yet of course, nothing is known for sure without a good listen to the album. What a year!

Best Album

The all around best album that was released in 2001. The album that represents the best of heavy metal in every way, with no flaws. The album in question must not be a disappointment in comparison to the band's own back catalog (but doesn't necessarily have to be the best of the band's ever done). The album must also have some sort of element of surprise. An album that's exactly as you thought it would be might be a great album, and well worth owning, but it isn't album of the year caliber. And lastly, the album must stand up in majesty and caliber with all of the great albums of the past, because it is now joining them.

Best Song

This is going to be the most subjective thing here, as there simply isn't a good definition of what makes a song good. Still, the song that gets this award will certainly be among the better songs released this year. Album long songs don't count.

Best Cover Song

Best adaptation of a song which was written and previously recorded by another artist. There are no hard and fast rules (such as, 'can not change the song' or 'can not play the song exactly like the original') to win the award, but the song must make sense to the rest of the album it appears on, and not be a joke to qualify. The songs that do qualify will be songs that taught us something about the performing band, the band that originally performed it, or the song itself that we didn't know before.

Best Cover Art

Best original cover artwork for the year. Not only must the artwork be technically superior, but be an accurate visual image of the sound contained on the CD.

Best Overall Packaging

As with the cover art, but must be consistent throughout the packaging. Every panel, the traycard, the disc print, the back cover, everything must keep up the same standard of quality and tie in with the music of the CD.

Best Production

This award goes to the producer who did the best job of bringing a studio CD to life. A clear, powerful production with full distinction between instruments, not muddy or cluttered.

Best Male Vocals

This award goes to the best male vocal performance over the course of an entire studio album. Only clean vocals are considered for this award.

Best Female Vocals

Identical to the previous award, except for female vocals.

Best Extreme Vocals

This award goes to the best vocalist, male or female, who gives the best performance over the course of an entire studio album consisting of 'extreme' vocal styles. The best extreme vocal style is definitely brutal and not for tender ears, but also shows variation and is not monotonous, and also allows in most case some enunciation to be heard and lyrics to be understood without the lyric sheet. Out of control shrieking where you can't follow along even if you know the words is not good extreme vocals, it is crap.

Best Lyrics

This award goes to the studio album that had the best lyrics in terms of structure, meaning, and overall quality.

Best Guitar Player

The best and most consistent guitar player over the course of at least one complete studio album released during the year. In cases where it's a guitar duo, credit will be given to both guys because I'm not able to pick out who is doing what more than any other reason.

Best Bassist

The best and most consistent bassist over the course of at least one complete studio album released during the year.

Best Drummer

The best and most consistent drummer over the course of at least one complete studio album released during the year.

Best Keyboard/Synthesizer Player

The best and most consistent keyboard/synthesizer player over the course of at least one complete studio album released during the year.

Best Label

This is for the US label that put out not only consistently good material during the year, but also made sure that the material was well packaged and effectively promoted their albums. The label in question must also be in a position to capitalize and expand on 2001 successes into the new year.

Best Live Album

Best album this year consisting primarily of live material.

Best Concept Album

Best album of the year which has a running story through at least three quarters of the album. Albums which are built around a theme, but are not a continuing story are not counted as concept albums in terms of these awards.

Best Re-Issue

Best CD, of any type, that previous to re-issue was out of print and generally unavailable, or remixed/remastered.

Best EP

This award goes to the best EP, single, mCD, or whatever you wish to call things that aren't full length albums, of the year, consisting primarily of exclusive studio material.

Album of the Year 2000 that Nobody Knew About Until 2001

This is the category for studio albums that were released at the end of 2000 that couldn't have possibly gotten into very many hands until 2001 was well underway. Because they are still technically 2000 releases, they aren't eligible for 2001 awards, but here's a little cookie for them as consolation for being left out of the 2000 awards. Notice to bands: If you like being included in year end awards but can't get your CD released before November 15, chances are you should wait until Jan 1.

Disappointment of the Year

The album of the year that great things were expected from, that failed to live up to those expectations in a spectacular way. This is not a category for crap albums or crap bands, but for highly talented bands working to their best of their ability yet produced a final result unable to give me the enjoyment and satisfaction that I get from listening to Anal Cunt's cover of the theme to Three's Company.

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To really make this a 'Year in Review' issue, let's take each category one by one and list who I think the contenders were, and in some cases (as space allows) examine the contenders and see where they stand in the grand scheme of things.

Best Album

ABSU This long established Texas black/thrash band has put out a lot of material over the years, but none as good as Tara. It contained inner meaning and still absolutely thrashed my head off. A big surprise as I actually haven't gotten all that much out of previous work so I hadn't been expecting all that much from this album.

AESMA DAEVA A real dark horse as absolutely nobody has a clue who they are, but if you want trippy, quasi-metal jaunts into opera and atmospherics, *The Eros of Frigid Beauty* is one of the first places you should look. It'll get a few spins around these parts.

ALAS Erik Rutan finally got *Absolute Purity* released, and it showcased his skill in technical guitar work (as if there was ever any doubt?) and dealing with melodic vocals to create a more than impressive sound. It deserved a look here but in the end, the songs are too similar throughout the CD so we'll see what their future brings us. Most of these songs are many years old so hopefully further albums will bring fresher material.

AMBEON Throwing out the fact that these songs are 'new age' reworkings of AYREON songs, because I can't recognize them and it's all quite, quite excellent and Astrid Van Der Veen is an absolute angel, I still can't see myself putting *Fate of a Dreamer* on a list that represents the very best of the music I stand for.

ARCH ENEMY *Wages of Sin* is definitely their heaviest and most raging album since *Black Earth* making this a

melodic death metal album in every sense of all three words of the phrase, and the guitar licks of the Amott brothers are surely impressive. New vocalist Angela Gossow isn't as distinctive as former frontman Johan Liiva, but she gets the job done and is neither better nor worse in her role than he was. So it doesn't affect the quality but I bet she'll sell quite a few copies more in Europe and the US for the band if Century Media markets her tits right. As always, superior twin guitar work and incredible solos on top of standard song structures here, but beefed back up to be a superior kick in the ass than *Stigmata* or *Burning Bridges*.

BAL SAGOTH There's nothing wrong with *Atlantis Ascendant*, and I believe it is at its worst, an equal album to *Battle Magic* or *The Power Cosmic*, but it is essentially the same album, and I can't go around naming *Battle Magic* in my 2001 Top Ten, now can I?

BLACK LEAGUE The *Doomsday Sun* EP had me craving the new album by Taneli Jarva's bunch, and it fully satisfied me as far as that goes, but the best? Last year, they made top 20, but this year, that same spark had a lot more competition. *Utopia AD* doesn't make the final cut. **BORKNAGAR** I'll get into this more in the Jan 22 issue in the full review, but the whole is less than the sum of its parts. There is nothing to point at specifically that's bad on the album, and I actually enjoy listening to it so there's no huge problem, but *Empiricism* was not all I hoped it to be.

DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE That *Death's Design* publicity was based on a charade doesn't take away from the album's awesome power and creativity, which I personally attribute to someone assisting Blakkheim and having writing credit. So does the big undertaking and audacity of the whole thing balance out the fact that there are no actual songs on this thing by design?

DORNENREICH *Herr Von Welken Nachten* may very well be one of the top albums of the year, but I can hardly stand up and declare it so in a definitive manner when almost a full year after its release I still can't make heads or tails of what the hell they're doing. This is the exact same reason why the latest BETHLEHEM isn't in a spot here either, although BETHLEHEM's not Austrian so I don't know what's up their crack.

ELVENKING If this band gets anywhere, it would be for pure surprise factor. Folksy power metal with some awesome ideas and a few incredible songs that led me to think of them in this way, but the vocals are too hit and miss and not all of *Heathenreel*'s songs are all that great. I do have a feeling we'll be seeing a lot more of this band in future years in this space.

EMPEROR I don't see how one can argue against *Prometheus*... as being a worthy album to represent all of metal. Furious, furious metal at its highest evolutionary point, not relying on 15 year old ideas, yet not succumbing to what conventional wisdom (and MTV) claims to be 'modern.'

ENSLAVED The former Viking metallers have gone all weird and progressive and trippy on us with *Monumentation*, which is fine as *Mardraum* warned us sufficiently. It's got its strengths and the band is an example of everything good and positive about heavy metal as a whole, but the production's a bit hindering and wild experiments are sometimes best revealed after being perfected.

EVOKEN When it comes to pure doom metal there just wasn't any better than *Quietus*, which is to the band's credit, but it runs into the trap of not rising above its genre, either. Bottom line is, I wouldn't put *Transcendence into the Peripheral* in my list for best of 1993, and this album may or may not be every bit as good, but it doesn't top it authoritatively in any way other than production.

FALCONER Sometimes, the oddest combinations make for the best albums. Take a former extreme metal guitar guy, have him get into the world of pop and step up with a big album full of big riffs and incredible songwriting to where every one of these no frills (is a folk influence a frill?) songs completely different from each other. Add in a singer who works in theater and doesn't sing in a 'metal way', and you have an album that's completely fresh without really being anything new, which at this point

may be more difficult that just making something from scratch.

FIFTH REASON Awesome progressive doom with great melodies that made incredible initial impact, yet *Within or Without* didn't have that staying power over the long haul and the band itself has split.

FINTNTROLL Jakten's Tid certainly tightened up the more comic excesses and proved that combining polka with metal was not something that had to be laughed at. It's an absolutely great album that's actually very fun and the only fault I see with the whole thing was no English translation of the lyrics.

GRAVEWORM The CRADLE OF FILTH sound is certain in fashion, even if they are not, and many fans are still hungry for the more serious metal they used to dish out. Enter GRAVEWORM, who certainly delivered with their most high profile album to date, *Scourge of Malice*.

GREEN CARNATION *Light of Day, Day of Darkness* was such an improvement over their debut, and the fact that a 60 minute song was pulled off in such grand fashion guarantees that this can't be forgotten. Ex-EMPEROR meets ex-IN THE WOODS, and it's not quite as extreme as I would have expected, but again, this one song is much more focused than any of the individual songs off the debut were.

HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE The who? That was my thought exactly as this cast of misfits culled from various bands that either aren't metal, or hardly anybody knows anyway (criminally so, in at least one case), released a real eye-opener of an album. *The Bastard* is almost like the final thesis from a student of heavy metal history. This band needs to be huge, and I hope the expected 2002 followup sees the quality continue and the notoriety increase as well.

HOLLENTON More Austrian madness as a real symphonic sound takes over and extreme metal really needs bands like these, that works this way without going the way of DIMMU BORGIR and being all Hollywood, but there are some production points that could be better and the lyrics lead me to believe that the album's not about anything, that the focus is on nothing more than neat sounds, and an album of the year needs to be a little bit more than that to me. What the hell does *With Vilest Worms to Dwell* mean, anyway?

JAG PANZER The song is the key, and even if the title *Mechanized Warfare* doesn't have fuck-all to do with the album, the mastery of the art form is displayed from the first moment to the last. This band's been a recording entity almost 20 years now and just gets better and better and better.

KATATONIA Did I mention 'songs'? Being depressed and hating life is a difficult thing to do over the course of album after album, but I still believe that Renske doesn't like living, and the music brings the message straight home. It's a bit less metal than in the past, which I guess some people have issues with but it is simply a beautiful album if you can sympathize with the sentiment, which I can a little too much. I wish they still beefed up their guitar a bit more but *Last Fair Deal Gone Down* is a sure winner.

KHANATE Very little in music actually scares me or freaks me out anymore, so when something does, I pay attention to it. *Khanate* features the utter doom of Stephen O'Malley teaming up with James Plotkin and Alan Dubin of OLD, resulting in 10-20 minute dirging, deadly, and truly disturbing material. Dubin's gonna bust a blood vessel or three, or all of them, if he keeps that up. It's incredible sonic torture. I've had deaths in my family disturb me less than this album has.

KOROVAKILL Metal needs more albums themed about water, and *Waterhells* was just what the doctor ordered! More 'metal for people who have grown out of metal', vanguarding the true progressive spirit of metal, and coming up with their best album yet certainly doesn't hurt their case one bit.

NIKOLO KOTZEV His *Nostradamus* project requires consideration just because of the scope of the thing. Three years and an all star cast just can't go unnoticed. But if this had been a one CD endeavor and had cut out so much of the fluff, he'd be a lot farther along.

LACRIMOSA Tilo and Anne have proven their ability to write giant orchestral pieces before, so the surprise factor wasn't there for *Fassade*, but their trademark for extreme quality indeed was there. Another night at the symphony, as it were, and LACRIMOSA are still on the upward path. **LILITU Memorial** is a monumental effort from an epic, melodic, dark metal band who are as much ANATHEMA as OPETH or IN FLAMES. Really dark stuff that really shakes you up on an emotional level and this is an album of true meaning.

LOST HORIZON Forget the silly outfits and stupid album cover. Awakening the World shows exactly what people who came up through extreme metal can do when they write power metal (see also: FALCONER). These people seem to be able to view the bullshit a lot better than those entrenched in the melodic metal scene so they stomp the living hell out of them. The lyrics are deceptive, and while everyone (including me) jumped on the 'exaggerated MANOWAR' angle, the real message is individualism and personal initiative, which is exactly what this band displays, bringing them to the top of a cluttered scene filled with useless bands.

MADDER MORTEM Female fronted bands are almost becoming a plague, wouldn't you say? There are still those that prove adequate, and even essential, and *All Flesh is Grass* is a powerful statement against those who fear that women soften metal up. This is heavy as any album released, ever, and is innovative and great all around.

MANTICORA Another more unique entry into the power metal sweepstakes, *Darkness with Tales to Tell* just belted out song after song of very strong metal with, the key here, an utterly unique singer. Great stuff.

MAUDLIN OF THE WELL *Bath* and *Leaving Your Body Map* have to be considered one double album for our purposes (like AYREON's *Universal Migrator* releases last year). The band's out of their collective minds, and have turned heads outside of circles that usually tolerate death metal, and has gotten extreme metal fans to keep up with their proggy, calm parts, so they're well on the way. I don't know of a band with as many absolutely insane ideas as this, but I think the appeal, and genius, is the sum of its parts, while a close examination of those individual parts shows a band that still needs to gel a bit.

MEADS OF ASPHODEL A late entry, on a tiny label, but it deserves a look as far as this goes. But a medieval themed anti-Christian band (the damn thing's called *The Excommunication of Christ*) that has guests that range from ex-HAWKWIND to someone from BULLDOZER, and ends up with quite the unusual and whacked out (see a pattern, the good stuff is NOT NORMAL) kind of thing where the unexpected happens. That said, the production's not world class, but I wanted this name thrown out there because we'll be hearing more from these good folk, namely in the near future a split 12" with MAYHEM.

NOVEMBRE Vastly improving over their first three albums, *Novembrine Waltz* shows us what laid back and reflective metal can really do. More a progressive album that happens to fall under metal than a progressive metal album if you take my meaning. Some of the songwriting choices are just incredible and there's not a flaw throughout the CD

OPETH *Blackwater Park* put the band into wide popularity and the genuine touring schedule solidified the band's status to the people, and the album itself builds upon what *Still Life* accomplished, throwing in a few twists and using guest musician Steven Wilson to greatly enhance some of the songs. Another great album from a great band.

SIGH Another weirder band on a larger label than before that let a lot more people in on a previously well kept secret. *Imaginary Sonicscape* shows a band once again keeping the core of their sound (oldschool thrash metal with, uh, seemingly non fitting interludes) but pushing it forward, making it different than last time with different influences, and giving an entire new album each time out.

SLEEPLESS A moody, slow, not quite metal album that really impresses with each successive listen. *Winds Blow Higher* is something that just can't be ignored, and has impressed all those that have spent time with it. The

details paid on this thing are incredible, and although it's quite cliché to say it, this really is an album which requires headphones to properly appreciate.

SOLEFALD It seems to be a common theme for a lot of weird, weird bands to be appearing on this list, but the fact is that they offer the most unique listening experiences and have the most for a listener to discover. Thing is though, *Pills Against the Ageless Ills* is less bizarre than their previous albums, but even so weirds out the uninitiated. This duo's strength is that actually make coherent, memorable, hummable songs out of their chaos, and that's perhaps the weirdest thing of all.

THERION *Secret of the Runes* is undoubtedly their best in a few years, and it's a great album for sure, but after pushing and pushing their music to new levels, they've stopped moving and are releasing albums based on the same formulas, just varying degrees of quality. This band needs an imagination enema, soon.

DEVIN TOWNSEND Yeah, HevyDevy does it again with *Terria*, another wall of sound that transcends the quality of *Physicist*, yet is much heavier than anything since SYL. Devy is Devy, and I've not been disappointed with anything he's done yet.

TWISTED TOWER DIRE True metal has its problems, but there's always room for a band to do it, and do it well. *The Isle of Hydra* is an example of a band doing it very well, and needs a closer look (review and interview in the weeks to come).

VIRGIN BLACK Gothic metal usually isn't at all gothic and barely metal, although it's usually pretty crap. These Australians put some real passion and meaning into the whole exercise and transcends their genre, like all great albums should. This will get a US release in February, so we'll talk more in-depth about it then (and probably with the band, as well...)

WOLVERINE A more orthodox type of mid-period FATES WARNING sounding prog metal, but keeping some death metal influences and growing that goes a very long way towards keeping everything fresh. The band's SOL in my rankings this year, however, as all I have is a pre-master, so the sound's crappy and I haven't gotten hold of songtitles or lyrics, so I can't exactly rank it accurately next to CDs that are full editions. But, the album is excellent musically and as soon as I get a full copy it will be reviewed, and the band interviewed so we'll see what's really happening with a band both PAIN OF SALVATION and Dan Swanö have raved about. Very good stuff in any event.

ZERO HOUR The Towers of Avarice was definitely the best of the 'orthodox' prog metal crowd this year, probably because the focus was on keeping it heavy as hell, and creating disturbing, cold songs rather than more complex (and not as good) JOURNEY ripoff music. Excellent performances have put this over the top of many lists this year.

Best Song

AND THEN THERE WAS SILENCE BLIND GUARDIAN
BLEAK OPETH
THE DAGGER'S BLADE TWISTED TOWER DIRE
EARTH DAY DEVIN TOWNSEND
EVERASIA NOVEMBRE
FLYINEYE DISMAL EUPHONY
HOLLOW HIDEAWAY BRAINSTORM
I CAN NOT BE SAVED LILITU
IN THE WORDLESS CHAMBER EMPEROR
PASSING BIRD KATATONIA
QUEST FOR THE CROWN FALCONER
RAVENOUS ARCH ENEMY
THE SCARLET LETTER JAG PANZER
SEASONSPEECH ELVENKING
SHADOWS WITH TALES TO TELL MANTICORA
SURMOUNTING THE MASSES ALAS
SWEET LITTLE BROTHER AMBEON
SWORN IN THE METAL WIND LOST HORIZON
THE USA DON'T EXIST SOLEFALD

Best Cover Song

CLOUDBUSTING NOVEMBRE had not only the inspiration to cover this KATE BUSH tune, but

completely overhaul their own sound to do it, and have the sense to bring in a guest vocalist, in this case Ann-Marie Edvardson of THIRD AND THE MORTAL fame.

FEAR OF THE DARK We've all just about had enough of extreme metal bands butchering IRON MAIDEN songs, but GRAVEWORM was actually able to create something dark and unusual, and gives you the feeling there might indeed be something out there to fear. The original certainly fell a bit short on that mark. Absolutely incredible interpretation.

INCARNATED SOLVENT ABUSE ENFORSAKEN may take their worship of Mike Amott and the Gothenburg sound a tad too far, but by covering this CARCASS gem, they show the world what I've been trying to tell them for years now: The 'Gothenburg' sound and melodic death metal were around a long time before the recognized 'innovators' of the style, and that's illustrated perfectly by these guys. Good job.

KNEEL TO THE CROSS Honestly, I don't know SOL INVICTUS from a hole in my shoe, but AGALLOCH's cover here makes me want to track them down and find out what they're all about, and puts AGALLOCH themselves in a position to perform in ways they never have on their own material. What more can a cover song possibly be?

OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY The song's just a great one, whether it's the GARY MOORE original, the THYRFING version (misplayed or not), but it is really something different when NIGHTWISH got their mitts on it. It's played pretty straight, but the female vocals telling the tale of an adulterous love torn apart in a frame-up, well, it's something different anyway.

QUEEN OF THE DARK HORIZONS Just a couple weeks ago, I was watching Phenomena and thinking how cool that main theme would be if it was metalized. A few days later, the latest RHAPSODY came to the door and here it is, a song completely built on the skeleton of that theme. That RHAPSODY is basically using a GOBLIN song is incredible in and of itself, but that the whole thing comes off well is probably even more incredible. It's all rearranged and turned into other things so it's not technically a straight cover, but the entirety of the original is in here, sometimes in naked form, so what else do I consider this than a cover version?

Best Cover Art

ANOREXIA NERVOSA Jan Saudek's cover photo which is on *New Onsurantis Order* is really twisted, with a nearly naked little girl being almost offered up I guess her mother for who knows what. Just the kind of thing you look at and can't get out of your head.

BAL SAGOTH Martin Hanford's visualization of the bizarre concepts of *Atlantis Ascendant* is expertly done, and is absolutely brilliant and vibrant, jumping off the shelf.

JAG PANZER Travis Smith did a lot of work this year, but none of the actual covers were as striking and to the point as what he delivered for *Mechanized Warfare*. A real metal cover for a real metal album.

MADDER MORTEM Sometimes the simple ideas are the best. Christian Ruud just covered a face and a load of hands in mud, create a collage, and presto, you've got that truly strange construct that is the first glance into *All Flesh is Grass*.

RHAPSODY After some not some ideal covers, these guys finally found the perfect artist for them and Marc Klinnert delivered a detailed, realistic (well, considering...) piece of art that really represented the concepts of *Rain of a Thousand Flames*.

Best Overall Packaging

GREEN CARNATION An album about such a sensitive subject needs some impressive visuals to be 'complete', and *Light of Day, Day of Darkness* surely provides that. Colorful landscapes, then BAM, the black and white picture of the coffin which is a startling visual. This album's a good one, inside and out.

HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE The old wood engraving style that *The Bastard* sports isn't impressive to look at as far as a any single image, but taken as a whole through the booklet in this cool digipak, enhances the atmosphere

that the album is trying to create, making it seem like something really out of the middle ages. Of course, when they're rich and famous as they deserve to be from their work, they can re-release this with an actual engraved 'booklet', haha... But I like things like this, because it shows absolutely amazing things can be simple. All you need is basic competence with what you're doing, and that spark of imagination that really separates the leaders from the followers.

KATATONIA Great big digipaks surely rule, especially when every panel is of the thick card stock like this one. And then the actual artwork, and how the lyrics are presented, make this entire thing a sure treat for anyone who picked up *Last Fair Deal Gone Down* in this format.

NIKOLO KOTZEV A huge project deserved a huge presentation, and the deluxe 2CD box and extra thick booklet certainly delivered. Formatted lyrics, explanation of all the songs, individual photos of the band members, it just looked like a really big deal. Fitting for the album.

MADDER MORTEM Just as the cover is striking, they've got it right with the entire packaging. With the models, the photos, and the neat foldout revealing more fun with mud, the entire visual aspect of the album is formed by unusual, but not distracting or throwaway, images.

MAUDLIN OF THE WELL I've said it before, I'll say it again, I don't understand exactly what the band is doing on *Bath and Leaving Your Body Map*, but the spectacle got my attention, the volume of the material and the care in presenting it has kept me looking for months and months now. Two CDs, a code of numbers, geometric shapes, Hebrew writing, front and back cover artwork that all intertwine on the two packages, there's lots going on here, and it seems nobody tries to do anything like this with their albums. So here's some recognition for the efforts and attention to details.

SIX FEET UNDER Yeah, True Carnage sucks complete ass, but at least they can design a damned booklet properly. The band as zombies isn't the hot part of it, but the parade of fetuses in jars, lit so you can see their skeletons, is pretty damn creepy. No, make that very damned creepy. And it's photographs, and done well enough that I don't know if Paul Booth really went into some medical facility and snapped these pictures or if they're just plastic fetuses in jars. That, my friends, is success, and if you went into your local cafeteria and started flashing this booklet around, I daresay you could recreate that one scene from *Stand By Me*... If you gotta do gore, and you don't have Vincent Locke inspired to paint *Butchered At Birth or Tomb of the Mutilated* (as opposed to that Bloodthirst or Vile garbage), this is how to truly shock and sicken.

DEVIN TOWNSEND A shame the cover art is kind of, well, bland, but the full package of *Terria* is a feast for the eyes. The back cover, with the human torso impaled on a stake, with branches and flowers growing out of the stumps where the arms and head used to be, well, it's disturbing and eye catching and if that's the front cover it wins that award easily.

Best Production

Fredrick Nordstrom & Mike Amott ARCH ENEMY's *Wages of Sin*
Blakkheim & Dan Swanö DIABOLICAL
MASQUERADE *Death's Design*
DIMMU BORGIR and **Fredrik Nordstrom** DIMMU BORGIR *Puritanical Euphoric Misanthropy*
Ihsahn EMPEROR *Prometheus- The Discipline of Fire and Demise*
EVOKEN and **Ron Thal** EVOKEN *Quietus*
FALCONER FALCONER *Falconer*
Endre Kirkesola & Tchort GREEN CARNATION *Light of Day, Day of Darkness*
Tomas Skogsberg, Jocke Peterson, & KATATONIA KATATONIA *Last Fair Deal Gone Down*
James Plotkin KHANATE *Khanate*
MADDER MORTEM & Pelle Saether MADDER MORTEM *All Flesh is Grass*
David Bendayan & Maor Appelbaum SLEEPLESS *Winds Blow Higher*
DEVIN TOWNSEND DEVIN TOWNSEND *Terria*

Best Male Vocals

MATHIAS BLAD FALCONER certainly got a unique vocalist for the debut, and Blad had no background and no knowledge of metal at all when he signed on for the gig. What this managed to do is either confuse or delight fans, because he's all over a metal album and not singing in at all a metal style. It is part of the brilliance and I hope he never adapts.

DEREK BONNER Taking inspirations from music other than metal always makes for a more interesting vocal approach, but Derek's emotional (and at times maudlin) approach to his clean vocals in LILITU very much stand out, and drive home his points in that much more a convincing manner. You can hear him feeling what he's singing...

TOM ENGLUND If you're not paying attention to what he's singing on the latest EVERGREY album, it's very easy to realize that Tom's really becoming a world class vocalist by using his natural strengths and emotions and bringing it together without sounding like anyone else.

ANDY B. FRANCK The veteran of the German metal wars certainly makes his mark at long last to the world as his huge and varied performance on the BRAINSTORM album shoots him straight past so many of his peers who are still thinking we want to hear yet another Kiske, Halford, or Dickinson. They're all still around, so are their clones, so please, be creative in singing, like Mr. Franck here.

DANIEL HEIMAN There's been a lot said, and I mean a lot, about LOST HORIZON's approach to image and lyrics, but if you get past all of that, and just listen to the performances on the CD, you'll find that 'Ethereal Magnanimous' just utterly shreds on vocals. I can't even keep up, I'm out of breath just trying to sing along, and I'm not even belting it out. You want a power metal singer that sets a standard for power metal singers? Here's your boy.

HARRY CONKLIN The new JAG PANZER has elevated Conklin from 'great singer' to vocal GOD. He's up there with the best ever. His vocal artwork on *Mechanized Warfare*, whether it be for calm passages, really floofy singing, or the power stuff, it is all excellent and he does it all, does it often, and I'm wondering what he hasn't been able to do with his voice. Incredible.

RALF SCHEEPERS *Nuclear Fire* was immediately cool, and then cooled considerably for me, but when it comes to the sound of a man's voice, none scream 'Power and metal!' to me like Ralf's. His vocal performance was, as always, top notch.

DEVIN TOWNSEND I love this guy's voice, whether he's screaming, singing, or just talking on his CDs. He has that right mix of melody and power that makes his music, and his words, real, even if he doesn't have the hugest range in the known metal world. He's one of those vocalists that just 'is' and creates his own standard for this music.

Best Female Vocals

MARTINA ASTNER Stepping out of the shadows up backup and shared vocal duties, into the position of sole vocalist of ALAS has shown Astner to have the talent, but her vocal lines (and she didn't write them) called for her to be singing way high, all the time, the whole album, so that's not the greatest thing. We need to see a more well rounded vocal approach to see what she really can do.

MARIANA HOLMBERG Deep breathy voices go far with me, and I love her performance on the latest LEFT HAND SOLUTION album. The entire album is so warm and she complements and enhances the songs perfectly.

FLOOR JANSEN The proggies will kill me, but Floor's vocal performance on the new AFTER FOREVER is the only redeeming point of the entire album. I think she's really limited by the material as what she's shown on the AYREON material she's been on (and will be on this year!), but clearly, for doing the standard 'women metal vocalist' things, she's at a superior level than most of her competition.

AGNETE KIRKEVAAG Probably the best this year at redefining what a female vocalist is supposed to sound like, not going for the soft or operatic, but delivering strong and creative vocals. The MADDER MORTEM rules mightily, and this is one reason why.

MICHELLE LOOSE Luckily, *Before an Audience of Stars* was never officially released by a label before, so Michelle gets a nomination as just an EP doesn't qualify. Anyway, her voice is so full of energy and life, it's impossible to not be amazed, and I actually feel quite sorry for the rest of BRAVE because when she opens her mouth, they're all just a backing band. Simply a great singer.

MIA STAHL The performance she gives on the latest PROJECT HATE album *When We Are Done Your Flesh Will Be Ours* will probably raise more than a few eyebrows, as the lyrics are completely Satanic and violent, but Stahl's calm, even jazzy delivery greatly contrasts with the growler on the CD, making her stand out all the more. Worth a look but I think the performance stands out more because of that contrast, and while it makes the album an awesome listen, I don't know that she could carry it off herself.

JANIS TANAKA Much the same case here, as Janis is certainly the effective choice for the Chaos Goddess Dragon thing on the HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE album, but really, if you dropped out the music and the other vocalists, does she stand on her own against these other women here?

ASTRID VAN DER VEEN This girl was 14 years old when she recorded *Fate of a Dreamer*. 14! How Arjen actually produced the album and didn't get arrested for.. oh, nevermind (but look at that CD and tell me she actually looks 14! No way!)... She qualifies for this award even though essentially this is a re-work of old AYREON songs because the vocal lines and lyrics are brand new, all Astrid, and she's absolutely phenomenal. She carries the whole thing, because with a bad or even OK vocal performance here, the album's an utter failure.

Best Extreme Vocals

MIKAEL AKERFELDT Many are amazed at Akerfeldt's vocals mainly because he can sing cleanly as well, but if you listen to the brutal vocal work on the OPETH albums, there's no excuses needed. It's deep and guttural these days, but one can make out the words, and more amazingly, it sounds just like that live. He makes it seem effortless. There are reasons why it's this guy breaking down the 'I hate growling!' barriers to the proggies.

DEREK BONNER In the review for Memorial I wrote that he sounded like he was overloading the microphone, and 'demon of hell' was another term I used, and I still feel the same today. Just incredible and emotional.

ANGELA GOSSOW When ARCH ENEMY needed a new vocalist, they certainly called the right person. I'd certainly never know it was a woman if I didn't see the credits. Not a boring performance at all, and certainly not relying on the fact that it's a woman to distract from the quality of the vocals, she stepped right up and delivered sounds that were just as brutal as any heard this year.

TANELI JARVA Gravel throated rock and roll isn't exactly what happens in THE BLACK LEAGUE, but if you amplify the rock to the metal, and then take that same amplification and apply it to the vocals, you have some idea what's going on here. Jarva's long had one of the distinctive voices of metal and let no one ever forget that.

JORGEN SANDSTROM Thanks to Massacre's not so good promotion, nobody's heard what this guy's throat can do, but his work on THE PROJECT HATE is incredible brutal, controlled, and enunciated, more than most and it's unbelievable the abuse he puts his throat through to make these noises. Not run of the mill, he goes for it.

Best Lyrics

Astrid Van Der Veen AMBEON *Fate of a Dreamer*
Byron Roberts BAL SAGOTH *Atlantis Ascendant*
Tchort GREEN CARNATION *Light of Day, Day of Darkness*

The Hammers HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The Bastard*

Jonas Renske KATATONIA *Last Fair Deal Gone Down*
Alan Dubin KHANATE *Khanate*

Derek Bonner LILITU *Memorial*
Agnete Kirkevaag & Tord Nygjelten MADDER MORTEM *All Flesh is Grass*

Jorgen Sandstrom & Kent Phillipson PROJECT HATE *When We Are Done Your Flesh Will Be Ours*
Cornelius SOLEFALD *Pills Against the Ageless Ills*

Best Guitar Player

Stephan Forte ADAGIO *Sanctus Ignus*
Erik Rutan ALAS *Absolute Purity*
Johan Reinholdz ANDROMEDA *Extension of the Wish*
Mike and Chris Amott ARCH ENEMY *Wages of Sin*
Ihsahn and Samoth EMPEROR *Prometheus- The Discipline of Fire and Demise*

Tom Englund and Henrik Danhage EVERGREY *In Search of Truth*

Janne Pennanen, Miika Luolajan-Mikkola, and Jani Loikas NOCTURNAL WINDS *Of Art and Suffering*
Mikael Akerfeldt and Peter Lindgren OPETH *Blackwater Park*

Luca Turilli RHAPSODY *Rain of a Thousand Flames*

Best Bassist

Martin Furangen LOST HORIZON *Awakening the World*

Pawel Kolasa SEPTIC *Pathetic Being*
Maor Appelbaum SLEEPLESS *Winds Blow Higher*
Paul S. WINDS *Of Entity and Mind*

Troy Tipton ZERO HOUR *The Towers of Avarice*

Best Drummer

Proscriptor McGovern ABSU *Tara*

John Macaluso ARK *Burn the Sun*

Nick Barker DIMMU BORGIR *Puritanical Misanthropic Euphoria*

Trym Torson EMPEROR *Prometheus- The Discipline of Fire and Demise*

Tino LoSicco EPOCH OF UNLIGHT *Caught in the Unlight!*

Eddy Garcia PISSING RAZORS *Where We Come From*

Mike Guy ZERO HOUR *The Towers of Avarice*

Best Keyboard/Synthesizer Player

Dan Swanö DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE *Death's Design*

Mustis DIMMU BORGIR *Puritanical Misanthropic Euphoria*

Martin Shirenc HOLLENTON *With Vilest of Worms to Dwell*

Alex Staropoli RHAPSODY *Rain of a Thousand Flames*
Lazare SOLEFALD/BORKNAGAR *Pills Against the Ageless Ills/Empiricism*

Andy Winter WINDS *Of Entity and Mind*

Best Label

CENTURY MEDIA Yes, they did great things in the US by giving Olympic, Inside Out, Nuclear Blast and Noise the ability to get their releases distributed, and also brought some Spinefarm, WAR, and Black Sun stuff to light as well. They signed and released albums by bands like AND OCEANS, FINNTROLL, SIGH, and SOLEFALD, thus showing an interest in the real future of metal and not just dollar signs today. But they also were involved in whatever dispute has resulted in the latest ARCH ENEMY being delayed a year in the Western world, and they declined to release the latest NOVEMBRE and MADDER MORTEM albums in the US, which is ridiculous to the point of madness considering those album were better than 99% of what's on the rosters.

DARK SYMPHONIES After hearing about how they supported MAUDLIN OF THE WELL on putting together their great new albums, and getting the ARISE FROM THORNS CD finally out to a lot of people, it's hard not to think of this label as one of the smartest out there. Don't know what they were thinking with WITHOUT FACE, but if there's any justice in the world, they'll have a more than prosperous 2002 with new NOVEMBERS DOOM and BRAVE albums looming. **THE END** Releasing CDs from AGALLOCH, EPOCH OF UNLIGHT, and SLEEPLESS is certainly a good way to get on someone's good side, but with the announced new signings and licenses and US distribution deals, The End is proving to be a real driving force in metal.

Dumping NOKTURNAL MORTEM shows they've got brains, too. Don't know what possessed them to distribute that EDGUY album in the US though. But the label's grown by leaps and bounds and 2001's releases are so much higher in presentation quality (production and packaging) than their releases in previous years, and the best is yet to come...

HAMMERHEART Just two years ago, it would be unbelievable to think that this label could even be considered for such a position. Their list of artists is both long and varied, their best being damned good and even their worst are competent. An aggressive reissue campaign to keep old important albums available to the public doesn't hurt their cause either. Expanding at a scary rate, these guys are.

INSIDE OUT A powerful force in the progressive scene these days by virtue of their distribution, they put out the EVERGREY album which regardless of the opinion in this office, has moved mountains in the scene overall, and proved willing to back up their bands with more than one trip for EVERGREY to the US, and then getting the FLOWER KINGS on tour. They took some chances by releasing the NDV and EVENT albums as well, so it was a great year for them as far as releasing a diverse and creative roster, but their releases really didn't grab me like their incredible series of 2000 releases (PAIN OF SALVATION, MASTERMIND, AYREON) did. They have the new PAIN OF SALVATION coming up very soon, so hopefully 2002 will be more LotFP friendly for them.

LASER'S EDGE They came out with a very strong string of releases in the progressive field, with not a one of them being any worse than OK. Packaging is always top notch, and they had a strong presence at Progpower promoting both their band on the roster (SPIRAL ARCHITECT) and their scene as a whole.

NAPALM Yeah, they have a silly policy as far as their album covers and a lot of their trend releases are just really shitty. But this is also a label that gets their stuff out there, has a wild variety of bands on the label, but still has an ethic to what they're doing.

SPINEFARM These Finnish freaks shoveled out an incredible amount of releases, just insane, and licensed a good amount of them out to companies that could do better jobs for their bands in foreign territories, in addition to being the main distributor in their own country. An example for the world, really.

Best Live Album

HALFORD *Live Insurrection*

NIGHTWISH *From Wishes To Eternity*

DEATH *Live and Raw in LA*

SYMPHONY X *Live on the Edge of Forever*

CREMATORY *Remind*

Best Concept Album

HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE The story of *The Bastard* is something that's detailed, has twists, and works in the rock opera rules of the different characters being represented by the different singers. We've got the fight of man vs. nature, evil kings, twisted gods, and behind the story, a real misanthropic philosophy. Mankind cannot live.

GREEN CARNATION A concept on two levels, musically *Light of Day, Day of Darkness* is inspired by his children. One of their deaths, and the next one's birth. Lyrically, (and I never touched on this part of it in my interview), there's an exploration of the mental faculties of two of his friends and how they get on with the world. Tchort told me that the album's key word is 'opposites', and after taking in the entirety of the album, I can't say he failed with any of his goals.

NIKOLO KOTZEV'S NOSTRADAMUS Nostradamus' life is largely guesswork, and by going with two full CDs of material, Kotzev did his damndest to fill in the blanks. Wish there was more of that inquisitor, though.

MAUDLIN OF THE WELL Well, um, after talking to a couple of them (back in LotFP Weekly #3), I still don't know if there's actually a concept here of they're just putting everyone on, but just to listen to them, there's

obviously a marvelous and grand concept going on here. Yeah. OK. If you say so, guys!

RHAPSODY I know, I know, the Algalord Chronicles are hardly Tolkienesque in its literary qualities, and yeah, that narrated needs to die in 99 different ways, but this is now four straight albums where one storyline has kept on. That has to count for something, right? Aside from one horrendous monologue, the story this time out isn't even all that bad, and come on, the next album is the last one for the story.

SOLEFALD Yeah, they must be taking some pretty good drugs up there in Norway. Revolving around the correspondence between two brothers, Pornographer Cain and Philosopher Fuck, after Cain is convicted of the murder of Kurt Cobain. Using this as an excuse, we're lectured on the intertwined nature of desire and repentance, and it's all a social commentary on the nature of humanity anyway. Quite strange.

THERION Norse mythology has been done to death by metal, but somehow, by concentrating on the nine worlds and keeping a tight focus, *The Secret of the Runes* keeps its credibility and doesn't come off as derivative in its treatment of the subject.

VAINGLORY Brave New World and 1984 are always good subject matter for metal songs and albums, mainly for the reason that we really do need to listen to that message and never forget what they are trying to tell us. The exploration of the future world of 2050 may be as in depth as all that, but tells the story in a straightforward and convincing manner.

Best Reissue

PAN-THY-MONIUM Osmose finally, finally reissued the first two albums of Dan Swanö's oddest band. *Dawn Of Dreams* and *Khaohs* were oddshit metal before it was really a thing to do, and they put them both in one package so it's all there in one package. I've had the albums for awhile, and if you really want to talk progressive extreme metal, this is it.

CANDLEMASS *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*, *Nightfall*, *Ancient Dreams*, and *Tales of Creation* all got the remastered, with bonus disc treatment this year, and the world's first truly majestic doom metal band really deserves the attention these reissues brought. And Messiah's back with the band now...

GATHERING Some of us remember the pre-Anneke years fondly (well, the time with Bart Smits, anyway), and to have Hammerheart reissue the demo and 7" material really made my day when I found out, because I knew that many people unfamiliar with that band's past would pick up on some great material. It's not *Always*, but it's the next best thing.

BLACK ROSE Is it a reissue if it was never out? I don't know, but the rehearsal of KING DIAMOND's band before MERCYFUL FATE shows some real potential and awesome playing in its own right, and it's scary to think what might have been, and what wouldn't have been, if this band had gotten a decent recording contract way back when...

PRIMORDIAL Getting *Imrama* back in print is way cool enough, but Hammerheart went the extra step and had *A Journey's End* mastered and re-released as well. Yes, I said mastered. When it was originally released on Misanthropy, they never mastered the thing, which explained its always crud sound. This band for some reason never seems to get what it deserves as far as recognition, which is a shame, but there's got to be better things ahead for this Irish troupe.

SAMAEL, **TIAMAT**, **UNLEASHED**, **SENTENCED**, **GRAVE** Some of Century Media's darkest bands of the past have really changed over the years, and people just don't realize what they were. GRAVE and UNLEASHED had just disappeared. (They're back now!) Century Media's 10th anniversary was a splendid excuse to re-release all these wonderful things, two CDs to a package, remastered, and out on the market. SENTENCED's technical death days (and *Amok*... yeeeeess!!) are there for you to see, TIAMAT when they were metal as all hell, and SAMAEL's metallic Satanic days, and the Swedish death assaults of UNLEASHED and GRAVE complete the set. This is metal history here, folks.

JUDAS PRIEST Talk about some relief! The early albums (and many say these latest two) just didn't sound up to par as the years went on and recording technology got better. Not to mention that so very many albums were just hacked onto CD when the format became popular and the care just wasn't there to begin with. Well, *Sin After Sin* through *Defenders of the Faith* finally got what was coming to them, remastered and with bonus tracks (out of historical sequence, unfortunately), and the next four to come in the new year. So that's MAIDEN, SABBATH, and PRIEST that's got the deal done. When do we get DIO and QUEENSRYPHE, damn it?

Best EP

AGALLOCH A release of material originally supposed to appear a few years ago, plus a couple new tidbits, usually is crap, but, well, this is AGALLOCH we're talking, where I don't think it is possible for them to be crappy. (We'll see when the new album's out.) The look at the earlier material is quite interesting, and the new material is stunning. The atmospheric, blackened doom style is great. Makes me hungry as hell for the new album, it does. A common theme for these EPs.

APHOTIC The band is still completely unknown (although a little bit less so now that I'd interviewed them), but *Under Veil of Dark* is one of the better dark metal works released this year. Gloomy, atmospheric, and excellent metal is what this is.

BLACK LEAGUE *Doomsday Sun* reminds me in concept to the old CATHEDRAL EPs in that they showcase a band's different side. They rock out more (!) and are darker less, making the band seem more well rounded, but obviously putting their 'different' material on the release not as many people are going to hear. Gotta love titles like Sanguinary Blues, anyway.

BLIND GUARDIAN Only two songs, but *And Then There Was Silence* does not fail in its two purposes. One is to hype up the album coming out early this year, the other is to be good in and of itself. The 14 minute monster of an epic is incredible, and BLIND GUARDIAN at its peak creatively (amazing, that is), but also the Harvest of Sorrow song is one of their stronger ballads as well, and is nothing to sneeze at once people actually bother to notice there is a second song on the CD.

NIGHTWISH I don't have the version with the live songs (which bothers me not because have the live album, ha ha), but all of the facets of the band are displayed on *Over the Hills and Far Away*, from the classic metal song, an heavier number, a really softer number, and a song from their debut done with new make vocals to really improve and destroy the original. Neat little purchase this was.

WINDS To its credit, and ultimately to its detriment, *Of Entity and Mind* sounded a lot like ARCTURUS, even having some of those guys appearing. A mighty statement of intent anyway, with the main difference between the bands being the vocalist. He's no Garm, but thinking on that, that's not such a bad thing.

YOUR SHAPELESS BEAUTY It's an hour long, but *Terrorisms Spiritual: Insoumission Complete* only has three new songs, and then some live songs and an old 7" tacked on. Another one of these bands popping up in the post-OPETH age, that's not gotten it quite right yet with their previous material, but these three new songs show this French band might have a truly original masterpiece upon their next album.

Album of the Year 2000 that Nobody Knew About Until 2001

VINTERSORG *Cosmic Genesis* is simply a brilliant album, and A Dialogue with the Stars is one of those career songs that so few bands ever write. A departure from Viking metal and into the realms of prog rock and 70s rock (Rainbow Demon makes me shiver), this is going to be one of the better albums released in the 2000s. **ALCHEMIST** *Organasm* is one of those totally refreshing albums that sounds like absolutely no one else, has incredible quality, and is almost like a gift to metal fans by being undeniably Australian.

IRON SAVIOR Released in December in Europe, *Dark Assault* didn't reach the US until 2001, and not only did it lose its chance at not only 2000 impact, but 2001 impact

as well as it came very, very early in a year that was glutted with shit releases in its genre.

WITHIN TEMPTATION Mother Earth came out in December 2000 in the Benelux countries, but it was available. The melodies, the overall craftsmanship of the music, and of course Sharon Den Adel make this a gem.

Disappointment of the Year

CATHEDRAL These guys are responsible for being alive, as *Forest of Equilibrium* and *Ethereal Mirror* got me through some hard times. I enjoyed it as they progressed and released some strange, but fun albums, but *Endyme* I just couldn't believe. Yeah, the band did exactly what they wanted and they're happy, but that Billy Anderson production, and the whole vibe, is completely different than what I want from a band I'm so utterly attached to.

EVERGREY I'll get flayed alive for this one because this is topping the 'best of' list of many people I know, but *In Search of Truth* stopped me cold. I need to repeat over and over that I liked the band, and I thought *Solitude Dominance Tragedy* was a monster of an album, and I anticipated the latest to be an album of the year quality. I was wrong. The storyline isn't so much the problem in and of itself, but if you wanted to listen to the album without worrying about aliens, you just can't. That's depressing enough, and then they've incorporated more prog metal elements into their sound, but the guitar sound itself is more fuzzy than strong, making it all sound kind of, eh, weak. The same songs performed at ProgPower in November granted these songs the majesty they deserved and I like the music more, but as for the album itself, sorry, but I just won't listen to it anymore.

GODGORY I've enjoyed the previous three albums, but somehow *Way Beyond* just fell so flat with me, I was a bit distraught. Metal that doesn't have an exact genre name quite yet is getting quite cluttered and bands can't go around releasing disappointing CDs, and these guys I had pegged for a lot bigger things than they delivered. Hopefully next time they'll get some of that back.

ICED EARTH I'm not the biggest fan of the band, but I actually was hoping *Horror Show* would have some great things going for it. DiGiorgio and Christy as the rhythm section almost demanded different things from *ICED EARTH*, more active, more exciting things, especially since Jon Schaffer is supposed to be this rhythm guitar god. Not the case. Then there was the supposed non-cheesy tribute to horror classics like Frankenstein, Jeckyll and Hyde (a dreadfully boring book, by the way), and the like. Non-cheesy? Christ... The production was pretty drab as well. And they are launching on to bigger and better things from this?

INTO ETERNITY Metal needs a disclaimer just like stockbroker commercials. 'Past results are no guarantee of future returns.' The self titled album was excellent and I went so far as to call them the North American version of *EDGE OF SANITY*. Now they've released *Dead or Dreaming*, full of its nu-metal riffing and guitar sound, and I feel stupid for believing there was greatness set up for this band. They're good, they're talented, and *Dead or Dreaming* does have magnificent parts, but they seem to be going for a sound that I just don't like these days.

SONATA ARCTICA I loved, I mean I really loved *Ecliptica* to a silly degree, with the really fast, yet catchy and melodic songs. It was one of those not fierce bands that I was really getting into. Then *Silence* happened, and it sucked, badly. It didn't stand out from the crowd, had some really embarrassing moments, I just couldn't believe this band did this to itself. Not fun.

TRISTANIA *Beyond the Veil* was a massive, massive album, no if, ands, or buts about it. But then the writer of the band skips town, and the band pieces together what it could, and *World of Glass* isn't much. It sounds like they were only halfway where they wanted to go so they decided to dog it. I expected great things from the band and they fell flat on their face.

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LOTFP 2001 AWARDS

BEST ALBUM

1. HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The Bastard*
2. NOVEMBRE *Novembrine Waltz*

3. OPETH *Blackwater Park*
 4. SOLEFALD *Pills Against the Ageless Ills*
 5. GREEN CARNATION *Light of Day, Day of Darkness*
 6. EMPEROR *Prometheus- The Discipline of Fire and Demise*
 7. MADDER MORTEM *All Flesh is Grass*
 8. DEVIN TOWNSEND *Terria*
 9. FALCONER *Falconer*
 10. KHANATE *Khanate*
- 2000 Winner NIGHTINGALE I
1999 Winner OPETH *Still Life*
1998 Winner OPETH *My Arms Your Harse*

BEST SONG

1. LILITU I Can Not Be Saved
2. BLIND GUARDIAN And Then There Was Silence
3. SOLEFALD The USA Don't Exist
4. DEVIN TOWNSEND Earth Day
5. OPETH Bleak

BEST COVER SONG

1. RHAPSODY *Queen of the Dark Horizon*
2. NOVEMBRE *Cloudbusting*
3. GRAVEWORM *Fear of the Dark*

BEST COVER ART

1. Jan Saudek and Vant ANOREXIA NERVOSA *New Obscurantis Order*
2. Marc Klinnert RHAPSODY *Rain of a Thousand Flames*
3. Martin Hanford BAL SAGOTH *Atlantis Ascendent*

BEST OVERALL PACKAGING

1. Lorraine Rath HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The Bastard*
2. MAUDLIN OF THE WELL *Bath/Leaving Your Body Map*
3. Christian Ruud MADDER MORTEM *All Flesh is Grass*

BEST PRODUCTION

1. GREEN CARNATION *Light of Day, Day of Darkness*
2. FALCONER *Falconer*
3. MADDER MORTEM *All Flesh is Grass*
4. KHANATE *Khanate*
5. DEVIN TOWNSEND *Terria*

BEST MALE VOCALS

1. Harry Conklin JAG PANZER *Mechanized Warfare*
2. Daniel Heiman LOST HORIZON *Awakening the World*
3. Derek Bonner LILITU *Memorial*

BEST FEMALE VOCALS

1. Michelle Loose BRAVE *Before an Audience of Stars* (as ARISE FROM THORNS)/*Waist Deep in Dark Waters*
2. Agnete Kirkevaag MADDER MORTEM *All Flesh is Grass*
3. Astrid van der Veen AMBEON *Fate of a Dreamer*

BEST EXTREME VOCALS

1. Mikael Akerfeldt OPETH *Blackwater Park*
2. Jorgen Sandstrom PROJECT HATE *When We Are Done Your Flesh Will Be Ours*
3. Taneli Jarva BLACK LEAGUE *Utopia AD*

BEST LYRICS

1. SOLEFALD *Pills Against the Ageless Ills*
2. HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The Bastard*
3. Derek Bonner LILITU *Memorial*

BEST GUITAR PLAYER

1. Chris and Michael Amott ARCH ENEMY *Wages of Sin*
2. Ihsahn and Samoth EMPEROR *Prometheus- The Discipline of Fire and Demise*
3. Erik Rutan ALAS *Absolute Purity*

BEST BASSIST

1. Troy Tipton ZERO HOUR *The Towers of Avarice*
2. Maor Appelbaum SLEEPLESS *Winds Blow Higher*
3. Martin Furingen LOST HORIZON *Awakening the World*

BEST DRUMMER

1. Tino LoSicco EPOCH OF UNLIGHT *Caught in the Unlight*
2. Trym Torson EMPEROR *Prometheus- The Discipline of Fire and Demise*
3. John Macaluso ARK *Burn the Sun*

BEST KEYBOARD/SYNTHESIZER PLAYER

1. Lars Nedland SOLEFALD/BORKNAGAR *Pills Against the Ageless Ills/Empiricism*
2. Alex Staropoli RHAPSODY *Rain of a Thousand Flames*
3. Dan Swanö DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE *Death's Design*

BEST LABEL

1. THE END RECORDS
2. DARK SYMPHONIES
3. SPINEFARM

BEST LIVE ALBUM

1. NIGHTWISH *From Wishes to Eternity*
2. HALFORD *Live Insurrection*
3. DEATH *Live and Raw in LA*

BEST CONCEPT ALBUM

1. HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The Bastard*
2. SOLEFALD *Pills Against the Ageless Ills*
3. AMBEON *Fate of a Dreamer*

BEST REISSUE

1. PAN-THY-MONIUM *Dawn of Dreams/Khaoohs*
2. PRIMORDIAL *A Journey's End*
3. SENTENCED *Amok/Love and Death*

BEST EP

1. NIGHTWISH *Over the Hills and Far Away*
2. AGALLOCH *Of Stone, Wind, and Pillor*
3. BLIND GUARDIAN *And Then There Was Silence*

ALBUM OF THE YEAR 2000 THAT NOBODY KNEW ABOUT UNTIL 2001

1. VINTERSORG *Cosmic Genesis*
2. WITHIN TEMPTATION *Mother Earth*
3. ALCHEMIST *Organasm*

DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE YEAR

1. EVERGREY *In Search of Truth*
2. CATHEDRAL *Endyme*
3. INTO ETERNITY *Dead or Dreaming*

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And now, the news. You aren't going to believe this shit. "Frontiers Records / Now & Then Productions are finally able to announce the details of one of the most amazing and hugely awaited projects ever! During the spring 2002 the label is going to release worldwide the first episode of a Rock Opera Trilogy called GENIUS. The first episode entitled *A Human Into Dreams' World* shall feature such characters as: Mark Boals (ex MALMSTEEN, RING OF FIRE) as 'Genius', Lana Lane as 'Doorkeeper', Daniel Gildenlow (PAIN OF SALVATION) as 'TwinSpirit n.32', Chris Boltendahl (GRAVE DIGGER) as 'Stationmaster', John Wetton (ASIA, URIAH HEPP) as 'Mc Chaos King', Steve Walsh (KANSAS) as 'Wild Tribe King', Oliver Hartmann (AT VANCE) as 'Wild Tribe Consultant', Midnight (ex CRIMSON GLORY) as 'Maindream', Philip Bynoe (Steve Vai, RING OF FIRE) as 'The Storyteller'. More details on the cast of characters of the next episodes shall be announced in the near future. The music and lyrics have been completely written, arranged and produced for Frontiers Records by the Italian musician Daniele Liverani, know for his work with the progressive metal band EMPTY TREMOR. Daniele plays all Guitars, Keyboards and Bass on the whole Opera, except drums that are played by the incredible human engine Dario Ciccioni. The whole concept runs around the many characters that Genius meets during his journey, only 8 of which are appearing in this first episode. Furthermore, a storyteller will help the listener to follow the various events... During the three chapters of the story the listener shall be able to experience the thrilling adventures of the teenage drummer Genius that gets accidentally captured into an unknown parallel dimension where he discovers the secrets of human dreams creation. Unfortunately, he has also the chance of creating a lot of problems and paradoxes which will put in serious danger the whole existence and the safety of that parallel dimension. The music style is very varied featuring a unique and spectacular blend of Melodic Rock, Heavy Metal and Progressive Metal styles for 72 minutes of music powered by a winning cast of some of the best singers from all the ages and styles... The album is currently in the final vocal parts recording stage and shall be mixed by Mike Slamer (STREETS, STEELHOUSE LANE, SEVENTH KEY) in Los Angeles during January 2002." I predict that this will be the most excruciating and sucking 72 minutes on disc in 2002. Really, 'Wild Tribe Consultant'? Boltendahl on the same album as Wetton and Walsh? Does anyone else see a problem here? I can just imagine the unintentional humor the lyrics will provide as we follow the 'thrilling adventures' of a teenage drummer. Arjen Lucassen was spotted online with the great line, "Wow... I don't know if I should regard it as a compliment or just as plain ripping me off." Really, he did!... From ANAL CUNT's website: "As of december 21st 2001, after A.C.'s show in Fitchburg, Massachusetts ANAL CUNT have finally broken up. There will be no more new recordings, no shows, no 15th anniversary show, nothing. No particular reason except it's boring, and it's run its course. No ones mad at each other, no fights, it's just over." Oh, damn. They should keep the site open and just write new song titles... Relapse has released RAPTURE's *Futile* for the States... BURNY BY THE SUN releases *Soundtrack to Personal Revolution* on January 22... Some exciting news from VINTERSORG: "This evening we finished the recording and editing in Ballerina Audio, I must say that this album is becoming a monster, it's a very vast album, with lots of different grains from the horizonless music recipe. I dare to say that we've come up with something very innovative in metal music. The plan now is to record drums in January (everything except the rhythm section is completed), and after that, mix and master the album. It's quite a tricky process as we use several studios, recording in different format but we are confident that we'll manage

to pull it off nicely. On our way back from Umeå (the town where Ballerina is located) to Skellefteå, we were embraced by the most splendorous Aurora Borealis I've seen in years. We took that as an omen, as a token of our accomplishment. I can't wait to share this piece with you people." Sounds great, but don't bands usually record the drums first?... SIGH has decided to name their next album *Gavotte Grim*, and that as well as the JOHN COLTRANE tribute they're participating in should be out by summer... DIMMU BORGIR, CRYPTOPSY, KRISIUN, and DIABOLIC will all be hitting the US tour circuit for a month starting in February. Digger's obviously booking the tour because there's a shitty Olympic band opening up... From Kenth Phillipson on the PROJECT HATE website: "The new project we've mentioned here before including Peter and Jörgen of ENTOMBED, Leif Edling of CANDLEMASS, myself and one yet-to-say-yes-to-participate vocalist will now concentrate on completing the songs for the upcoming album now that Jörgen is back from tour. We don't know when we'll record this, but according to Jörgen, we already got a contract with Lee Dorrian of CATHEDRAL's label. Expect some heavy shit in the vein of TROUBLE, BOLTTROWER and CANDLEMASS, and of course, not to forget...BLACK SABBATH." The vocalist actually has said yes, and it'll be a huge deal in metal (shame it isn't already with ENTOMBED and CANDLEMASS members...) when the name is revealed... Lost Disciple Records is promising some big things with their upcoming releases. The new PESSIMIST album, *Slaughtering the Faithful* (how lovely), is out February 12, with production by Erik Rutan and engineering by Derek Roddy. The label promises that "PESSIMIST is poised to rise to the top and will be considered one of the elite in sadistic death metal alongside DEICIDE, MORBID ANGEL, NILE and KRISIUN!" I don't relish hearing anything like KRISIUN or DEICIDE anytime soon, but we'll see what's up... Lost Disciple has also issued a compilation from the Wisconsin band DUSK which includes the self titled EP, *Majestic Thou in Ruin EP*, and the song that was on the *Visionaries of the Macabre* compilation. Death-doom is the order of the day here... and lastly on the Lost Disciple front, "The layout is almost complete for COMPOS MENTIS' debut CD *Fragments of a Withered Dream*. Displaying some of the best highly melodic death metal ever! Fans of EUCHARIST, IN FLAMES, DARK TRANQUILITY etc will LOVE what they hear!"... "VEHEMENCE, the Chaotic Death Metal band from Phoenix, Arizona have worked with the well known record label Metal Blade Records for a record deal. You can check out the bands sickly designed website here at <http://vehemence.brutaldeath.net>. VEHEMENCE will be recording their second album called *God Was Created* in early February 2002! The new album will contain 10 songs featuring artist Evil Dave for artwork. VEHEMENCE release one song of the pre-production demo entitled *Fantasy From Pain* that can be downloaded off this website. The song will also be on Metal Blade's newest compilation *Uncorrupted Steel*..." Lee Robinson, of the band SIX CITY SIX, and formerly of A-10 and FORTUNATE SONS, passed away on December 27 from an unspecified form of cancer. The English vocalist had been living in Spain the past 12 years where his bands have been based... CRYPTOPSY will be on the tour with DIMMU BORGIR, KRISIUN, and DIABOLIC if I haven't mentioned it already... Dave Lombardo will be filling in on drums on some SLAYER tour dates. I'm really going to shit myself if he rejoins the band and suddenly they release stuff to match up to their early days...

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Reader Feedback

The MP3 Debate

I've been reading through the editorial that comes with Issue 8. In it, you describe two separate points - 1) Pre release mp3s distribution & 2) general MP3 distribution. With regard to the first point, if I was a record label and didn't want online distribution of mp3s from bands from my roster prior to the album's release, I wouldn't send out the promo until the album is released! I think that was

how TOOL's *Lateralus* was done (they may have had a pre-released single). Obviously this works better for artists who have been around for a while and have a stronger presence on a label. But really, it will be bands with a fanbase (whose fans are downloading these mp3s ripped from promos) that could work with less hype from journalists - ie. DREAM THEATER. Imagine if DREAM THEATER only just started. Do you think you would see people busting a gut to download *When Dream And Day Unite* if it was released right now? So could a solution possibly to release promos prior to an album's release for newer bands and older and established bands have promos released on the day of the album's release? Does this keep both record companies/journalists happy? In the end, it doesn't matter when the release date is or whether a promo goes out, it's going to be ripped to mp3 anyways somewhere down the track. <sarcasm>Why don't record companies save time and effort and release mp3 promos?</sarcasm>

With regard to the second point, I agree fully with the last paragraph. Just to let you know, I've downloaded the entire DREAM THEATER and as I type, I'm downloading the new PAIN OF SALVATION - both albums I will pick up on the day that they're released. Yes I am a pathetic fanboy. Care factor - nil. And CDs that won't play on computers - did you hear about the fuck up with an Australian artist, NATALIE IMBRUGLIA, whose latest CD was to contain the supposed protection? Apparently they wouldn't play on Car CD players or certain other players either due to the protection. Probably a good thing. My point was going to be, how long before that any type of copy protection is defeated? Refer to DVD copying.

Bryce Kelaart
Australia

The point of sending out promos only after the album is released is something that smaller labels already do, but for labels large enough to have in-store distribution, but not big enough to be on MTV or get radio play (and thus able to get by sending just a couple songs to those outlets), those first week sales are very important for the labels and their distributors. It isn't even a matter of keeping journalists happy, it's a matter of keeping us useful. No doubt MP3 technology is and will be a giant new way to publicize bands, and leaked MP3s 'against the band and label's wishes' are going to be intentional marketing tools as well.

As far as copy protection, nothing is foolproof. The idea probably is to make it more difficult so not everybody wants to take the time to do it to every CD. And the distribution points will be more the targets in the future I think than the individuals using them.

The simple fact is, the major labels are freaking out about the fact that the distribution of this music, which they are contractually have the exclusive rights to do, is out of their hands. Smaller labels are taking a more wait and see attitude, but this is going to end up I think in one of two ways. One is the labels retaking their control, which means that the net is going to be seriously more regulated for that to happen, or labels are going to lose power and it will move into the bands' hands since mass distribution and publicity is right there for them on the net. That would be a disaster for any money making concern, bands as well as labels. There's a reason labels have the power they do over bands right now, and that's because there's too much that needs to be done business-wise for a band to really succeed, and labels are pretty much the only way to get the foot in the door of that whole thing. Asking a band to pay for recording time, a producer, and CD duplication up front, then doing all of the marketing and sales themselves just simply doesn't work, or else there would be a ton of currently demo level bands making money, touring to decent crowds, and not sending anymore CDs to record labels hoping for a deal.

LotFP Weekly#12 January 8, 2002

Anticipation is a very funny thing. I've been waiting to present this interview for quite some time, as it's been ready for quite a long time. I've also been anticipating this album for quite the long time, as it's been over three years since the last one was released. I don't know what it is about these technical bands, but they are extremely slow in writing in comparison to, well, 'normal' bands. Is it the difficulty in remembering all the parts? The extra rehearsal needed to be tight? Eh, whichever, the new SCHOLOMANCE is finally here, and finally ready for you to get. That being the case, the interview must be unleashed, a mighty two hour conversation with guitar player Scott Crinklaw, trying to unravel the maze that is the SCHOLOMANCE composing style, and the labyrinth that is their lyrical concept. The Immortality Murder is an awesome album, beyond 99% of metal for sure (and my review of the album is this issue as well), so let's get started on what Scott has to say, shall we?

It's been about three years since your first album came out. What do you think the ultimate reaction and impact of *A Treatise on Love* ended up being?

It ended up lasting a lot longer than I thought it would. Up until spring and summer we were still getting people contacting us about. Even earlier this year, some interviews for it.

What were you expecting when you finally got the chance to put out an album?

I don't know. I was almost setting my sights on putting it out myself by the time we got in touch with The End. I had sent out promos to just about everyone I could think of and had only gotten a few minor responses and stuff we really didn't want to go for because it didn't really seem right. We were in this limbo state before Don [Anderson, of SCULPTURED] sent our stuff to Andreas [Katsambas, The End guru] and got him interested in us.

With the new album, what's the difference with this one waiting to be released versus the last one ready to be released?

This one is not going to be what people expect. People are expecting us to go more in the direction of the neoclassical shred stuff. We've still got all the classical influence but it's going to be a lot heavier than people think. I'm pretty happy about that. I wanted it to sound heavy and I think it does.

What do you think was the most profound reaction you had gotten to the first album, and what was the most unprofound reaction?

I had this German guy write me and I still have the letter on my desk. He sent me a more than four pages long typed letter just giving his opinion on the entire CD. It's more in depth than any review or interview we'd gotten through the entire past few years. It pretty well blew my mind! This is from a highly intelligent individual! He picked the whole CD apart! He went so far as to critique some of our grammar and word usage on the lyrics. Which was cool. He was correct on a few points. It was really cool. As for the other part, I don't know, I can't even remember some of the comparisons we got. Just being blown off as a black metal band kind of pissed me off. I don't consider us black metal at all! Some of those kind of things. We ended up on this totally occult web page for the most satanic black metal bands. There's pentagrams and 666 and all this other shit all over it. All these other bands that are completely satanic and all this cult stuff. And then there's us! Why the hell are we there?

Bands aren't about that kind of thing, but are way out there, get that reaction. PAN-THY-MONIUM, before they'd let on exactly what it was, were getting grouped in with the most evil and cult bands ever and the first album had lyrics taken from a hardcore CD! So what have you been doing these past three years then?

We really should have had this sooner. A lot of personal stuff got in the way. Going to school, working, Jimmy's [Pitts] daughter. It's been hard trying to get it together. Our writing process is rather long and intense to begin with, so anything that doesn't go smooth sets us

back even farther. We've been having band practice, getting tight, playing shows here and there.

You're still managing to get this album out sooner than the SPASTIC INK album is going to be out.

<laughs> Yeah, I don't know how long ago Jimmy started working on that keyboard stuff! I don't even know at this point what's going to be used or not! He recorded at least one or two solos. It ended up being the opposite of what we thought it was going to be. Jimmy wanted to lay down this shred rip your head off solo stuff and Ron [Jarzombek] ended up liking the bluesier stuff. It kinda pissed Jimmy off in a way! It was cool though because he put it over this really fucked up off time section. It'll probably sound really cool.

How did his appearance come about for the new SPASTIC INK?

I don't really know. Jimmy is really into the progressive stuff, a little more than me. He and Jerry [Twyford] both had been into Watchtower. Jerry especially was way into WATCHTOWER. They were just keeping a closer eye on SPASTIC INK and the website and ended up getting in touch with Ron. Over the course of a few emails Ron asked Jimmy if he wanted to do some solos.

So how do you feel knowing Mr. Jarzombek then has heard your CD and judging the chops there?

Oh, well, I'm not... That guy, I can't even really describe his playing style. He's totally inhuman on many levels! He tears my fucking ass up! I know he probably thinks I just suck ass!

Doesn't it kill you knowing he had some major hand injury some years back too?

Yeah! His sense of rhythm and timing he uses is what really impresses me more than just the shred, you know? That's the stuff I really get off on. He's an amazing guitar player.

But very, very slow, apparently. But you said your writing process is slow and difficult to begin with. What goes into creating one of these monstrosities?

Jimmy and I have a totally different writing style. He will have these ideas worked out in his head, and then he'll sit down and string a whole song together on piano and keyboard. He'll have a whole song done and he'll give it to me and I'll play with it awhile and figure out drums to it and then guitar stuff. I'm trying to think if his are faster or mine are? I sometimes have a hard time coming up with guitar parts for his stuff because he writes from a piano player's point of view and then I have to turn piano riffs into guitar riffs. It ends up being opposite from what I normally do as a guitar player. What I usually do, I'll be practicing keyboard or guitar or whatever, and I'll come up with something. One or two riffs a day, something like that. I'll record it and save it for later. When I think I have enough I string them together. By that point I'll have the guitar and the piano stuff at the same time. Each riff comes together totally, then I put the parts together and they'll have drums and keyboards and then I'll put them together.

What would you say your goal with your songwriting is?

I kind of look at it, I'm more song oriented as a whole. I never set out from the beginning to be a lead guitar player. I just want to play rhythm and write songs. I'm more concerned with writing a good song with memorable stuff. Just something that will stick in people's heads. The shredding is secondary.

You say you want stuff to stick in people's heads, but you have to admit this stuff is pretty convoluted!

Yeah it is, but the thing is, not an entire song, but I end up with riffs that people end up humming. We're in the studio and our engineer really caught on to some of the riffs, and he's humming some of the riffs hours later. There's some catchy stuff in there, you just have to find it... I was really happy with the way the vocals turned out this time. A lot of the vocal lines turned out to be really catchy. I was really stoked about that! I like death metal that is catchy with the vocals and lyrics and everything.

You certainly didn't make boredom! These vocals don't sit still for a minute. In extreme metal that's not something you find every day. These days the typical example is CHILDREN OF BODOM, it's just the same 'Wharrghh!' over everything.

Jimmy approached the vocals close to last time. He's really into classical music, he's really into traditional vocalists like Bruce Dickinson and things like that. At the same time, he's this total screamer. He's looking at the vocals this time as classical counterpoint to the music. Classical vocals! That's how he ended up doing it. You can hear a lot of different stuff that he's doing. Some stuff ended up being almost doubled and other stuff is just off on a tangent. It's almost always different.

What impressed me, and I guess it worries me a little bit, you've got the bonus CD you did without the vocals on them. After listening to the regular version of the album a couple times, when I put the second CD on, I'm singing the vocal lines and thinking the vocals are missed in these versions!

That'll be true for the people that are into the harsh vocals. The main reason we put the instrumental CD on is because with the last CD, we had a lot of progressive people who really wanted to listen to the CD but just could not hack the vocals. We would get an awesome review, and at the end they would slag it for having the harsh vocals. In that way we're reaching out to two different audiences, the prog people and the more mellow people can get into the instrumental CD and the piano parts.

That second CD isn't just the songs with vocal tracks on there. You went in and put special extras in between. Why did you decide to put the piano interludes just on the instrumental CD and not between the regular versions of the songs?

We didn't even really know we'd get to do a double CD until shortly before we went in the studio. It all came together pretty quick. We did the piano stuff the last night we were in the studio when we were mixing. It ended up being seven to nine at night and we just played. We had some people last time accusing us of not being able to play piano because they thought we sequenced everything, which was a load of shit! We were like "Fuck those people, we're going to improv some stuff and show them we can play!" We didn't want to include every song from the album as an instrumental. We didn't feel they could all stand alone as instrumentals. So we picked the five best ones and thought we should have something extra for that CD too. Like bonus tracks!

You have done something I've wished with just about every CD I have! Having karaoke versions! There are so many CDs I have that I wish, instead of just having the EQ settings on the stereo, to be able to just push a button and take out the vocals, or take out the drums, or the guitar, and just hear it without those elements. And there you are, you've got it without the vocals! Bring it to parties, sing along!

If we have a Norwegian fan or Swedish fan, they can now sing it in their native language!

That would be great being in front of a bar with these lyrics flashing up on the big screen for everyone to read along!

I don't think drunk people who really even understand beyond the first song!

That would be the ultimate! But one thing that you guys continue to do is use the drum machine. You've told me that one thing you're looking for is a drummer who can actually handle this level of stuff. It sounds to me that these parts were composed with the drum machine in mind and not a person.

There are a few that were. I looked at it in two ways. I like the drums to sound somewhat realistic and technical, that a drummer could do. But at the same time, I figure I have all this technology in front of me, I might as well use it and see what I can come up with.

How difficult is it, after you and Jimmy come up with your weird shit, for you to program the drum machine to actually fit?

It's extremely difficult! It's maddening! I've played with enough drummers that a drum machine is more welcome than almost any drummer in the world would be. It takes a lot of time. And the way I program drums is not step recording. On a drum machine, a lot of people will set it and loop it, and do the kick on one pass, the snare, and then the cymbal. The way I program is real time. I'll do the kick and the snare and the cymbal and a lot of the ride

and hi-hat stuff in one pass. Jimmy always says something about me being a hand percussionist. In some ways that's true. You have to be really fast. I am totally meticulous about it and at this point I have a pretty perfect sense of time. If it's not perfect, I'll do it again and again until it is. Some beats are pretty intricate.

You got a lot better sound on this CD than you did on the last one. What would you credit that to?

Better studio and a better engineer!

What was so screwed up last time? The sound was pretty muddy.

It was what we had to work with. There were so many things looking back that should have been different. The guy we worked with, pretty nice guy but totally unfamiliar with metal. Considering that, he did a pretty good job consider we threw a band like us at a guy like that. He was pulling his hair out! He was stressed out! And to have us in there too, and being the perfectionists that we are, making him go back and do these things that he'd never done before, then at the same time he wanted to force his techniques onto us that don't work for this type of music. He has pretty good equipment and everything...

I've never been in a recording studio, but it would seem to me that the essentials of recording to at least get a clear sound, I'm just not understanding why it depends on the kind of music to make a difference between a passable recording and a complete disaster.

It has a lot to do with the engineer himself. Last time, we ended up really fucking up my guitar sound from what it was. We went into the studio with good guitar sound, and he was having an impossible time for it to come through. Finally, we ended up tweaking my pre-amp and changing my sound, which is wrong! That's against everything I had ever known! He was being a total cocksucker about it so I did it just to see if it would work. It didn't get any better or worse. It just kind of stayed the same. I don't know what he was really doing to make it go so wrong as opposed to this time when Greg, our engineer, pretty much said "We'll just mic it up and let you run your cabinet how it sounds live and get it on tape." And we got it really close.

So has he ever dealt with anything quite this insane?

He never had. He had been to California and back running sound for hardcore and metal bands, and himself. He'd played in LA kind of glam bands before. He's a pretty good musician actually, decent guitar player. He's got his own band that he's doing, and a lot of it is pretty cool. He'd never done anything as layered and massive as what we are trying to. At least with heavy music, he'd done classical.

The final result, you went over the time period planned, but I don't see how you'd planned on doing this in a week anyway.

Well we had no choice. That's what we had to do. We're the kind of people that shoot for it. We got fairly close. I wish to hell we would have had a bigger budget to have more time, it would have ended up sounding twice as good with maybe just another week. You do what you can with what you got.

With the extra CD, you're being targeted beyond the extreme metal audience. Any anticipation of where this one might lead?

It's going to depend on how Andreas markets it. I kind of felt with the last one that maybe he didn't hit on the progressive side enough. I'm hoping he shoots for that some because we are going in new directions with it. I'm kind of hoping to hit the musician crowd a little more this time.

... and leave behind the people who think you're twisted and evil! But looking at the lyrics, you are!

Yeah, we are that too!

I have more confidence in what this album's going to do, just because the label's been around for three years at this point, as opposed to last time when it was hardly around at all! How was it signing to a brand new label that was absolutely unproven? You said you'd turned down offers you weren't comfortable with...

It was Andreas as a person. It was him, it was his personality, the things he said to me, how professional

and dedicated right off the bat. I thought this guy was a genius, or fucking nuts! He knew right from the start what he wanted to do, and he's done a great job! Just using your intuition towards a person. I felt he was someone I could trust, and hold to artistic integrity.

I don't know if you're still doing it, but you were the ones listening to demos for The End?

Yeah, I'm still doing it that too.

How did that come about?

I think I was just talking to Andreas one day, and he said he didn't have time to respond to all the bands that were sending him tapes. Being the diehard underground freak that I am, it was important to me that every band should get some kind of reply from a record label. So few labels respond to bands at all. That's really shitty to do to someone. Bands that are just starting out need the encouragement, and they need the criticism. I said that to him, and I don't remember if I offered to do it, but I'm still doing it. We get a lot of shit!

I couldn't imagine having to deal with it. Being in that position is a lot more important and being able to bring the hammer down on a band just from a review.

How do you handle that? You get a lot more crap than things you get that have promise.

Oh, absolutely. There's some stuff I just can't believe someone sent it! That they spent a dollar to send this out in the mail! Some of it is just god fucking awful. Then there's some bands that are pretty good, and occasionally there's a band that makes you go "Wow!" Those are the bands that make it worth it. I kind of feel bad sometimes, because I think a certain band is amazing and Andreas will think they suck! Then I'll have to write the band and turn them down and feel stupid doing it. One of the other things that ended up being good about it, is that people who I had to send a rejection letter to would write back and say "Thank you for listening to our tape or CD! We don't get any replies and it's cool that you take the time to listen to the stuff and write back." That makes me all warm and fuzzy.

So what are the current trends out in demodom?

Actually, I couldn't say there is one. The huge pile I've got sitting next to me right now, it's got everything from the Norwegian black metal stuff, to WHITE ZOMBIE, GODSMACK stuff, total power metal, a little bit of everything. Hardcore too. The underground is in a limbo as to what people are wanting. I will say that I guess you can call them variety bands, where you have the traditional heavy metal twin guitar stuff, and couple it with death metal vocals and regular vocals and female vocals and things like that. It's not death metal, it's not goth, it's this other thing. That seems to be pretty popular.

Variety metal. <laughs> Next on the Ed Sullivan Show...

I do have to say this, though. And this is important because it really pees me off about doing the promo stuff and getting the shit. Fucking bands need to take more time with how they present their stuff. I'm sure you know this. You get a package from someone and it's a blank CD and a one page letter. Not even a bio. "We're such and such band, we're looking for a label." That is retarded. When you have a huge shitload of CDs laying on the floor already, and somebody doesn't even take the fucking time to put a label on their own CD... I can mix CDs up in five minutes and not know which band is even which! People need to take the time to make a cover and send a bio and label their stuff.

Especially today, I get CDR demos, they have labels on them, they've printed out covers to make it look like a real CD package. Just amazes me that I get things in the mail just the CD bubble wrapped without even a letter. Ooh, pride in your work!

Yeah! That's another thing. Where I come from, you take pride in your stuff and how you present your music. It seems to be that you used to get good quality j-cards with the tapes. We didn't have CDRs being sent so much back then.

Think you're skewed by the fact that The End doesn't release so much your normal kinds of music?

When I do this, I do have to anticipate Andreas' tastes. For me, when I sit back and listen to all the bands [on The End], I do hear something, I can't describe it, but

something within all the bands that unifies them. It's pretty strange because all the bands sound totally different. There's nothing alike. But there's something there that makes them a group. Maybe the whole bizarrry of it. Each band has at least a somewhat nontraditional sense of melody. SCULPTURED is just fucking crazy. AGALLOCH is as straight a melodic band as is on The End, but still John [Haughm] doesn't come from that traditional schooled point of view. His own sense of melody is different.

In general, you're just all nuts. Really! There's not one normal band on The End! The closest to it is EPOCH OF UNLIGHT, and even that is not really normal!

Well they're interesting because where they live is this small, contained death/black metal scene. If you listen to the other bands that are near them, you can hear similarities. For the most part, they do something pretty different.

I don't know if I'm ready for that Memphis death metal mafia.

ABOMINANT is from around there, ASSISTING SORROW, I don't know if they're still around, they had some pretty good guitar stuff.

ABOMINANT is signed to an Atlanta label, Deathgasm! So now, the title The Immortality Murder is something of an oxymoron. What does it mean?

I couldn't say that the name itself really has any grand sort of meaning. It was more or less just playing with word combinations and just trying to come up with a title for the lyrics. The lyrics focus on sort of ghostly, supernatural type things, and at the same time there's a murder mystery going on through it.

It's definitely going to stand out. The cover is not the nicest thing I've ever seen, but it's not an extreme grossout cover either. People aren't going to look at it and think "This is nice, happy, cheery music!"

The cover, I didn't really have that planned for very long. It was just something I got a hold of and it looks cool. I had other cover ideas that went along with the interior layout of the booklet. They didn't really grab you when you looked at it, you know? I wanted something that stood out. Something shocking but not to the point of being stupid.

Reading over the lyrics the past few days, well, usually when going through this line of questioning it's no big deal to ask a band for a song by song summary, but in your case, I want to just go line by line and say "What the hell is this?" To give people a clue, the first song is called Contorted Porcelain Faced Bitch. That's fucked.

Yeah. There's really a part before that...

The Absence. But that's not as shocking, so we skip that for now. But where does Contorted Porcelain Faced Bitch come from.

I don't know. It's sort of an image in my head more than a meaning. When I was writing these lyrics, I was fairly deranged. More so than the last CD. Believe it or not, the entire concept portion of the CD, I wrote those all at once. I sat down late one night and poured it out, which is fairly unusual for me to do. I didn't title all the parts. I had some of the parts titled first and then wrote the lyrics to them. That one was just, having the image of porcelain as being very fragile, and sort of pale and white, and this whole ghostly thing in my head going on. It's hard to describe. All these lyrics are going to be a bitch to describe!

It's your own fault, making them with such vivid imagery. I guess I should back up into a more simple question. Why a partial concept album?

Pretty much because that's what time allowed. Some of the other lyrics that are later on the CD, the second half, were written right after *A Treatise on Love* and then *The Immortality Murder* came later. We had the older songs and they ended up being later on the CD. It was sort of like the last CD, because we did have a partial concept on that as well. It's just different from what people usually do. At the same time, we had the older songs that were styled a little bit differently than the new ones. The new ones came out a lot heavier. If you listen to Virus on, the songs sound different.

This almost begs for vinyl release then! Side one, side two.

That would be cool. I would love to have it on vinyl!
What do you expect people to take from this style of lyrics?

I honestly don't really care.

Then I guess the question would be what do you get from putting out these lyrics?

Just my own sort of therapy. The same way that I write music, I write lyrics. It's just what comes out of me. I know some of these lyrics are going to be way over people's heads and there's going to be parts where people have no clue what we're talking about.

Parts?

Well, the thing with this also, with the new website, and the photos that go along with it, it's going to be a little bit more clear, if not totally. It's building a mystery and the next CD will be a full concept, and it will go a thousand times farther than this one has.

I'm scared. I'm just scanning over the lyrics, I couldn't make notes on them because I still don't get what they're about, but there are certain phrases here I wanted to ask you about. I know I'm taking it completely out of context from the rest of the song, but the question 'Would it kill to settle for non perfection?' Taken by itself, is a completely amazing question.

That one's a little easier to explain. The song has to deal with the faults we find with people in relationships. Especially myself since I'm such a perfectionist freak. I can find fault in just about anyone. I have to battle myself constantly if I'm in a relationship, or even being friends with someone, to not tear them apart in my head for what they do wrong. Things I think should be different. That line is sort of saying that.

That whole verse there follows through with that, but that's some pretty deep shit.

That whole song is a little bit different from everything else on the CD I think. It's a little more into philosophy than some of the other stuff and that's how I intended it.

And here's another line that stood out to me. 'How many decayed corpses do I walk upon and how many innocents have been stolen from us? Would they themselves have learned to kill?' I love that. Where did that come from?

Coupled with all the insanity of all those lyrics is some pretty obscure personal information about myself and my family and things I've done and seen. That one, I'm not going to tell you who, someone in my family has a really morbid preoccupation where we can go for a walk and this person will look, literally, off the edge of every bridge, expecting to find a body. I find that rather disturbing. Especially from the person it comes from. It's something that's always stuck with me on that part. Actually to answer your question though, sometimes living where I do in the countryside, and being isolated, locally, a lot of people turn up missing here. And they're never found. Occasionally they will find a body, but very seldom are people found here. It often makes me wonder what I'm going to run across when I venture out into the woods. It makes me wonder how many dead people there actually are around here. It's really bizarre to think, you'd have to live in the area to really be familiar with it. It's also something that's overlooked by people here.

So you're not figuring people are up and leaving for the city?

This is girls, women, guys my age, middle aged guys, all suddenly turn up missing. Missing from their car, missing from their home. I've heard for years and years that we have several serial killers operating in the area. I believe we do because it would seem obvious. The police force in this area of the country are fucking incompetent.

Well that's great. Maybe people looking for bodies over bridges isn't so nuts.

Exactly! It wouldn't be that shocking really.

That's a cheery view of the hometown. I live in the middle of a city and I don't hear that much screwed up stuff!

This place has some bizarre news.

Mayberry from hell? And so this contributes to all the weird shit that ends up on the CD?

Yeah. It's just taking small things from life and applying it in a different way than being straightforward with some of it.

Even the very first line, and it's audible, 'Some things occurred to me this night.' Right there, it's a brilliant opening line because it leaves you open, expecting more, wondering what's coming. A little detail, it seems that listening to all other CDs where you hear the first line, you know where you're going. Just a simple little thing.

That opening paragraph, I was actually fairly proud of that. It was the beginning of madness.

Is this shit you just scribble down any old time, or do you just sit down and say "I'm going to get this done"?

No, because you can't force this. It's just when inspiration strikes is where I write lyrics, Jimmy too probably. It's usually late at night when I get in a certain state of mind where I'm relaxed enough and clearheaded enough to start scribbling or typing stuff out and go on and on. There's actually probably a good two pages of stuff related to these lyrics that aren't on the CD. At least half of it I'm going to try to incorporate on the website, to give more details on the story.

There's got to be stuff you've written that you've looked at later and thought, "There's no way I can tell anybody this stuff."

Yeah. There's stuff that I've had the intention of using for lyrics but it ended up being too personal, or too stupid, or too juvenile. This was one of those things, *The Immortality Murder*, that I did without the intention of having them be lyrics. You can tell when you look at them because they're in paragraph form. I write a lot of prose on my own, more than standard structured poems or lyrics. It was one of those things I did and I said "This is good, this should be used for something." Jimmy liked it, so we used it.

Some of those vocal patterns sound so natural. How'd you take this and put it into that?

A lot of that, we feel that the new songs have more of a driving force to them than the last ones. They have more of a rhythm and harder beat that moves them along more than the songs on *A Treatise on Love*. A lot of the lyrics, Jimmy just found, by some miraculous means, just fit into some of these rhythms. Which is really strange because everything was written separately and we didn't even intend to use these as lyrics. It ended up being really cool.
Why did you decide to put the concept material first, instead of leading with the older stuff into the more driving material?

We really like to put the newest and the strongest songs earlier on an album. Which is what we did last time. We just thought the new songs were a lot stronger and we wanted them to be first. It doesn't make sense to me to start out with older songs. Take a song like *Virus*, it's two years old, at least. It was written right at the tail end of *A Treatise on Love*. We didn't want to start it out and sound like the last album.

I have to ask, do all of you guys still have the long hair?

<laughing> Yeah! Yes! We're still pretty!

Well, that question I asked you in issue number two started a long tradition of asking all sorts of people, what kind of hair care products they used. And since you are now appearing again, and this hasn't been asked of anybody this issue [interview done before the decision to make the mag a newsletter...], these days, three years later, what hair care products are you using?

<laughing> I can't speak for Jimmy or Jerry, but I'm using Pert right now.

The two in one condition stuff? Does that work? The shampoo part works fine but when I use it I still can't get a brush through my hair.

Maybe it's genetic. It's like what I used when I was younger, I tried expensive shit to be prettier and healthier, and it wasn't. It was just more expensive.

Do be proud though. Everyone up the line to Mikael Akerfeldt and James LaBrie have been asked that hair care question that started with you!

And not everyone saw the humor.

To hell with them! But now to the human interest portion of our newscast. Toys. If people thought we were getting into morbid and disturbing things before. We are really going into the depths of depravity here. GI Joe? Thundercats? How old are you, man?

26.

So I've got a huge Lego collection. But you're still interested in more toys. So you're still more screwed up. Explain yourself!

I don't really buy too many toys anymore. I buy once in awhile the McFarlane Spawn stuff, because that's twisted and demented looking. Those are cool as hell! Occasionally I'll be on Ebay and find some mint condition Whiplash He-Man figures. Yeah! I need that! None of mine are still in the package! My are all open and played with and I still have all the weapons. I haven't lost any of the good stuff.

Makes you feel dumb for playing with the crap!

But it brought so much joy.

I remember Castle Grayskull.

I still have most of my stuff. I was smart enough when I was in my teens when you stop doing that stuff, that I would regret selling all that stuff in a garage sale. Most people I talk to regret it like hell! Guys hold that stuff near as life! I've got a shitload of stuff.

My parents hated it with me because when I got into something, I had to have everything! When I got into He-Man my friends thought I was crazy and a little tinkerbelle because I had my mother buy me the Teela figure. "Why are you buying a girl figure?" Some psychiatrist can make a fortune off of me for many reasons, but one of them, I always had Teela having an affair with Beastman. I don't think that should ever be explained...

I had Skeletor kidnap Teela and rape her in the dungeon and all that good stuff. I had Teela and Evilyn, the only one I didn't have was the Sorceress, I couldn't find that one.

Most of these toys were associated with cartoon shows, which were basically advertisements for the toys. How closely did you mirror the plots of the television shows?

Very rarely. Occasionally a comic book, because most of them had a comic as well. The He-Man figures came with the cool little books so I'd play that scenario out, but I was a creative little kid. And I had a lot of toys. And very few friends! So I came up with some stuff on my own. I don't look at those cartoons as advertisements though. Being an artist myself, I look at cartoons as a form of artwork.

Some of them were awesome. The one thing of the entire Transformers and GI Joe was the episode where Shipwreck thinks he's been in a coma for years and years and he's actually on a Cobra island being brainwashed to give out GI Joe secrets. Some of them had pretty good stories.

You had the whole Destro family being this secret masked cult. That was some evil stuff if you think about it for a cartoon and subjecting kids to that kind of stuff. People used to say He-Man was the big satanic cartoon because of the characters and Skeletor and all that horseshit. All those cartoons were the most moral. They were all about friendship and bonding.

What the hell was Orko, anyway?

<laughs> Everyone always wanted to see what Orko looked like without his cloak on. God I was fucking pissed off when I got that figure and his hat came off and he just had a black little bolted head with his ears, you know? That was fucking lame! I was pissed! Like Cobra Commander and Snake Eyes and you want to take their mask off and they have a second mask underneath the first mask! That's cruel!

Did you cry when Optimus Prime died?

No. I generally like the bad guys better in just about every series of toys. They were always cooler.

Did you notice that when Megatron was re-done for the newer Transformers, it was no longer a gun?

I watched some of the computer animated shows. Beast Wars, and something else. Optimus Prime was a gorilla. What the fuck? How did he get from a diesel to a freaking gorilla?

I couldn't believe they made Megatron a tank. He used to be fun! He'd be a Walther PPK, James Bond! I guess they don't want kids to run around with guns in their hands anymore.

That's true. For obvious reasons, with kids shooting schools. But that was an awesome toy right there! A totally detailed gun, scope, stock, and everything. Extended barrel, that was cool! Some of those Transformers were pure genius. Soundwave I thought was one of the coolest ones ever. That was one of those toys you could take to your parents and other adults and say "Look! I got a tape player!"

Everything was such a pain in the ass to actually transform while playing with them that all my plots had to do with the little mini autobots, two movements and they're done, and the tapes. That was easy. Were you anal about looking at the stats on those cards?

Some of them. I would look at how strong they were and stuff like that. Strength always interested me when I was younger. You had the Marvel Universe characters and it told how strong each one was. I was fascinated with that.

Who did you think was the most retarded Transformer?

Ironhide! He didn't have a head! Just this windshield, this square plastic flat thing with a face on it? That was retarded! Then then had the medical one, the ambulance! It was exactly the same thing.

God, we're getting pathetic. Which of the GI Joe girls did you most want to have sex with?

Uh. Baroness!

Why was that? Lady Jaye was my pick.

Baroness had the best sculpted body of all of them. She had the black leather outfit, plating, she had the best tits of all the action figure!

And glasses! Purr...

She was smart too! But she was taken by Destro.

And Lady Jaye was taken by Flint. It's pretty sad in a children's cartoon to have this love story where they always get caught in the closet. On her figure, too, the zipper on her top was unzipped like halfway down her chest.

That was a cool figure, because she was one of the pretty detailed ones when they were trying to put a little more detail into them. There was Cover Girl, they never did anything with her, she was one of those non-existent characters.

Didn't she come with a tank?

The Wolverine.

It made no sense for her to come with a tank.

That was a cool tank though.

The most realistic, lifelike military equipment available to children. It came with some awesome blueprints.

I loved the blueprints. You'd look at them and try to figure out what everything was.

What other 80s toys really got you going?

Obviously Transformers, GI Joe, and He-Man were the big three. MASK was probably right after that. Those were really cool. When I was really little, I loved hot rods and cars. Completed fascinated by them. I would always draw cars and cars and cars. Little like a transformer and the little guys with the cool masks.

What I loved about the cartoon, the music they used to do the establishing shot of the bad guys, somebody needs to cover that in metal. It was mean and evil!

A lot of the 80s cartoons had metal based music. Hard rock and stuff. The Transformers movie, the soundtrack to that was total shredding guitar stuff going on in that. That was pretty cool!

Why is it, in both Thundercats and GI Joe, you'd have a season with the normal goofy enemies who can't do anything, He-Man was like this too, and then they'd introduce this brand new villain who for the first week was this unstoppable villain, and then they're goofy goats again.

Just introducing fresh blood like He-Man did with Hordak and the Evil Horde. Those were cool characters! They could have done a lot more with those characters because they were pretty twisted. They just need fresh blood and get some new interested into it. Kids get bored.

This is all wasted on kids! Can you imagine the potential for the He-Man series if all this was aimed at adults?

It would end up being like the Japanese anime stuff. A lot of that is aimed at adults and they do have ongoing series. It would be like that.

Did you ever get the GI Joe space shuttle or aircraft carrier?

No. I didn't.

Weren't those the most ridiculous things?

I never thought the aircraft carrier was that cool. I did think the space shuttle was pretty cool. Both of them were majorly out of scale. Both of them were just too expensive for my parents to afford. I don't even know what the aircraft cost.

At least the space shuttle was relatively compact. The aircraft carrier was what, seven feet long?

Yeah. That was cool though. It's probably one of the most massive toys ever made. They had another thing later on, it opened up into four levels, this tan colored tank. It was really big. And they had the Cobra Terrordrome, and I really wanted that really bad and I never got it.

They got ambitious with some of that stuff. Earlier with Star Wars, they had things real early on with the Millennium Falcon and the Death Star that were huge!

I've got a lot of figures but just a few spaceships.

And then there were the AT-ATs.

Those were cool. Those were pretty costly. Those had the lights and needed batteries to make the sounds.

My favorite part of Star Wars was convincing my mother I needed more than one stormtrooper.

My mom never understood that either. I ended up going later into a flea market and finding like a hundred GI Joe figures and wound up getting them for like thirty or forty bucks. I bought them all! There were a bunch of cobra troopers, like three or four of each figure but enough to dress up your little army.

What was the most obscure toy series that you really got into?

That I really got into? Air Raiders! Do you remember those? Late 80s. They didn't do very well. They were real tiny figures, they weren't structured on the figures, they were structured on the vehicles and the ships and the bases. The figures were maybe two inches tall. They were all air powered vehicles, they had an air pump in them so if you squeezed it, it would shoot the missiles out. They had this one thing, called the War Hammer or some shit, it was battery powered. They had this Styrofoam globe, I don't know what the point of it was, but this globe sat on top of it, and it would actually blow that up so it hovered on top of it. It was pretty cool.

So we've completely bored and amazed and befuddled everyone about the toys now, because I'm going to print it...

You should!

Steering back on topic, what are some of the bands out there really getting you excited about music?

The thing I'm most psyched about right now is the new SYSTEM OF A DOWN. I love that band! I've been listening to the old CD steadily since I got it a couple years ago. I like MADDER MORTEM a lot. I've got *All Flesh is Grass*. I really like that. I haven't heard the CD before this one, but this one stands out for me, especially for the guitar sound on it. Oh my god! Huge! Just massive! Vicious, distorted Mesa Boogie guitar sound! It seems their riffing is pretty unique. It pissed me off that Century Media marketed them as sounding like THE GATHERING. No fucking way! Totally insulting, really, to MADDER MORTEM. I like that CD a lot. SCEPTIC, have you heard those guys? They're good. They're not totally totally unique, but for tight, technical death metal, they are about the best I've heard for awhile. Their first CD is better than the newest one, *Pathetic Being*. It's a little more like ATHEIST to me, it's got a little bit of DEATH, and maybe a little bit of CYNIC.

How come not many bands take that direction as far as influence? There seems to be this void. I know it's a problem to find people to actually play it...

There's really not a lot of bands that can pull it off. It takes a lot of creativity, a lot of musical skill, being able to really play your instrument extremely well. What I think ends up happening to a lot of bands that might become something like that, the musicians reach this point of feeling they've really mastered their instrument and go on to play jazz or something like that. They get into classical. The leave extreme metal behind. I think that happens a lot, and I think that's why we don't hear more of it.

What's kept you in extreme metal?

I love it! I always will! I'll always love death metal. That was the life changing time! Just death metal itself changed me forever. Before that I had IRON MAIDEN, BLACK SABBATH, METALLICA, blah blah. And then I got a hold of DEICIDE and CANNIBAL CORPSE and was like holy shit! Something just has to click within a person's brain when they hear it for the first time. People usually love it right off the bat or they hate it and won't ever go back to it. There's people it will grow on, but I was one of those people who heard it and was hooked. At the same time, when CANNIBAL CORPSE, and DEICIDE, and MALEVOLENT CREATION and all those bands were breaking, I was 15, 16, somewhere around there? That was my teenage angst lonely years and I found this music that was pissed off and aggressive and at the same time musically interesting to me. It sounded challenging to play. I ended up writing some of those bands, and they would write back! I thought that was cool, that somebody listened to me when I was that age. I just got more and more into it.

Ten full years of loving being screamed at!

But the new stuff doesn't have the charm of the old stuff of course.

The death that the 'kids' are getting into these days, the new generation of bands like DYING FETUS, SKINLESS, that sort of thing. Relapse bands are taking over the function of what to me the Earache bands were for.

I respect those bands because a lot of those guys are really good musicians, but at the same time I would totally critique them for not really progressing. There's a lot of stuff you can do in brutal music that is unique, that does sound different, that challenges you as a player, but is still completely vicious and brutal sounding. Earache, I was watching that early grindcore video, with MORBID ANGEL and NOCTURNUS and PITCHSHIFTER and PROPHECY OF DOOM. Those bands were incredible! Each band on that label back then was totally unique. And every band had a personality. I don't think the newer bands have an individual personality from band to band. You had the extreme ego of David Vincent, you had PROPHECY OF DOOM which was straightedge vegan hippie grindcore freaks! Hell yeah! I thought they were awesome. NOCTURNUS were so different from what I thought they would be as people. They are so mellow and nice. That CD *The Key* is just god to me!

BOLT THROWER! The good old days... And it is oldies music to people just getting into the scene now! That's fucked, isn't it?

It is. Going back to the whole technical thing again, some of the old stuff is really complex, yet these bands made it sound easy. That impresses me. When I used to go see these bands, they would rip your head off every time you saw them. I don't really feel that with new bands. You get a lot of bands that don't have any stage presence. They kind of stand there and play and try to look tough. That's fucking lame! Part of playing metal live is putting on a show. I don't think there's anything wrong with theatrics on stage, getting into your own music, headbanging, headwhipping, no matter what you want to do, it's cool, because it's part of what metal is.

How do your live shows come off?

We haven't really played enough live to get where I'd like to be. Playing live for us is really, really hard as far as being on stage. This stuff is so intricate that we have a hard time getting anybody to give us a good sound. Part of playing our stuff live is being able to hear everything.

We're freakish to sound guys at clubs, because we have to hear so much drums out of the monitors at the front of the stage. We don't have anybody sitting behind us, and we need to hear all these intricate things. They're always asking "You want more drums in the monitors?" Fuck yes, turn them up!

What kind of crowds are around there?

Weird. We can, almost any band around here, can draw a lot of people one night, and have a really kickass show, play again, have five people show up. Assume the shows are equally promoted and everything. We've done shows heavily promoted on local radio and everything, and had nobody show up. Had shows where we didn't do shit, and had a bunch of people show up. Most of the people that come see us, at least in the past, most of the people were musicians. We know just about everybody around here that plays an instrument. We've all been around here since we were teenagers and playing live since we were like 18. We're the old guys now. Which is bizarre!

In 15 to 20 years, people will look back at the SCHOLOMANCE discography, at these first couple albums on the small label in particular, what do you want your legacy to be to the metal world?

I would just like to think we made people think a little bit on their own. That we challenged our listeners. It's pretty much as simple as that. I seriously doubt we'll be doing the same thing that long from now, but I'd like people to look at it as being good, technical music by good musicians.

Have you actually ever thought that far ahead concerning the band?

No, and I really don't because I never set out to be in the same band for 15 years. In 15 years I'll be 40! If I'm a 40 year old metalhead, I might consider myself a little bit of a loser!

Going to master your instrument and start playing jazz?

I would like to do other things. There's a lot of different kind of stuff I'd like to do eventually. Or I might just become a complete and total recluse and just be a shredding maniac in my own house! A lot of people do that.

The reason I even ask such a question is bands like DEEP PURPLE, BLUE OYSTER CULT, SABBATH, or MAIDEN, people from other generations have these bands which they got into growing up and they're still there for them. And then here's my bands now, and when I'm getting to be geezer age, how many of them are going to be there for me?

I just don't know if that will happen anymore. Those bands that you mentioned have this magical quality, and they are the originators of a new style of music. Everyone that comes after, and really everyone, METALLICA, MEGADETH, SLAYER, they're just followers. That sounds belittling to those bands because METALLICA are just gods to half the country. But they're not going to be around, and they're not going to be well respected, in that amount of time. You hear bands like CANNIBAL CORPSE, IMMOLATION, that type of band that say they just don't want to disappoint their fans, DISMEMBER is another one, they want to give their fans what they expect. I think that's kind of lame. To reproduce the same album for 10 to 15 years, what's the point? Where's the satisfaction in that? Sure, you make some of your fans happy but you have to make yourself happy. You can't just drone through it like it's a job! I don't really know if there will be bands like that anymore.

You're supposed to give me faith and hope for the future, damn it!

Well take CYNIC, for example. I think people are going to remember them. Maybe ARCTURUS, ATHEIST, DEATH, there will be a small group of people who really remember those bands. There's just something infinitely more obsessive in a person who likes that style of metal. They listen to those CDs and they know every note. And they don't get tired of listening to it.

How many listens through do you expect people to start getting what you're doing with this album?

Oh man. I would say at least a dozen before they start to really grasp all the layers as different parts of it are going on. Maybe more than that. It's hard to say because I'm so

familiar with it. I think a lot of our fans are pretty intelligent and they're into this kind of stuff. People that are into sitting down with a CD like this and listening intensely to it.

If sometime in the future someone would do a SCHOLOMANCE cover song, which one would be most likely to be picked?

Oh man. Probably something on the first CD for sure. Maybe Pride of the Serpent Winds? People seemed to catch onto that one more. I don't know about the new stuff. Each song is pretty heavily involved. I would love to hear somebody do a cover of our stuff. If they were musicians, if they weren't just butchering it! Maybe a band with a real drummer and two guitarists would be cool.

Well, this is a good time to end this after two full hours...

Ooh, is it going to be nine pages?

If anything is ever nine pages again, I am going to shoot myself. That's back when I had reasonable fonts. To finish up, any final words for the readers?

Buy our CDs. Be sure to check out other bands like us too. But check out the new CD and hopefully you'll dig it.

Discography

A Treatise On Love (1998 The End)

The Immortality Murder (2001 The End)

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New This Week

GREEN CARNATION *Light of Day, Day of Darkness*

1- 60:08 The End/Prophecy

Yes, that's correct, this is one sixty minute song composed wholly by Tchort, also of BLOOD RED THRONE, CARPATHIAN FOREST, and formerly of EMPEROR and SATYRICON, among others. GREEN CARNATION isn't extreme metal though, but perhaps it is a bit more interesting that it comes from someone who's done nothing but extreme metal in the past. So anyway, it's Tchort, some people from IN THE WOODS (no idea who exactly since the credits on IN THE WOODS albums, and I have five of them, are foggy), it totals out to 14 musicians, and two choirs. Well over 100 recording tracks went into this, and being an ambitious

project there's a lot of 'oh wow' factors and the who and what of it are very important, but after all of that, the important thing is, what does it sound like, and is it any good? You're damn skippy it is. It's set up from the start to be a very long song, with very little in the way of repeated passages. Very linear, as it has passages where focus is drawn in on the details, and then these sections are connected by passages that wind along where you have to make yourself pay attention. The basic style throughout is probably closest to doomy metal, the original Pink Floyd meets Candlemass isn't the most accurate, but it paints the appropriate pictures needed to know if you'd enjoy this or not. A lot of it is calm and wandering and not metal at all, but there are plenty of riffs that can belong to nothing else but metal, with plenty of these riffs being damned heavy by any standards. That there are choirs and orchestration should not make you think this sounds like Therion in any way, shape, or form, as the childrens choir is only in briefly for less than a half dozen 'ooh ahh' sequences, and the regular choir is only in for a tiny bit accenting other lines. In fact the vast majority of the vocals are taken care of by just Kjetil Nordhus, singing in a clean, even tone. Not a lot of range, but fitting the low key nature of much of the material. When it does get to the refrain (the more uptempo sections at around 15:00 and 30:00 that begin with what I call the 'crying riff') the voice gets more active too. A scant few death metal screams are here, mixed not too high and just in the eight to ten minute mark for accent, not much to it and not anything that would make me even imagine calling this an 'extreme metal album.' Should be easily ignored by those who don't like such things, and maybe overlooked entirely by those used to such things. There's a more, um, unstable clean vocalist that pops up primarily later in the album, I do believe that's IN THE WOODS' Jan Kenneth T, adding some spice but I really prefer Nordhus myself. But anyway, this is not an album for the impatient, as you might well imagine, the real guitar riffing doesn't even start until three and a half minutes in (combined with a cool organ), and seems to fade in and out of that heaviness pretty often. The orchestration doesn't really pop in until the halfway point, when it becomes part of this very cool bouncy rhythm with just drums and bass, leading into the second coming of the crying riff. After that refrain though, the song changes. The mood just ends, and we start fresh with the new chapter. Thus begins the most controversial part of the song, and where most people seem to have a problem, if they indeed do find one in here. For about six minutes, there's pretty much a solo section with a saxophone, and a female vocalist (Synne Soprana, I think) warbling, screaming, and singing over it. Very disconcerting, and as I said, it's a complete break from everything that came before. After that, it starts building back up, with very cool piano melodies (that actually remind me of the vocal melodies of POWER SYMPHONY's The Song of Man ballad), with the organ and heavy guitar over it by the time it builds back up, creating the most dense part of the entire recording. They never do hit the refrain again in the entire last half hour, although this is the part that Jan Kenneth comes in and it ends just about the same way it begins. It's a full circle. They throw in other tidbits here and there, like Arabian sounding guitar work, 'tribal' drumming, just spices so the entire thing never gets dull, always has somewhere that it's going. Only at the halfway point does a transition seem awkward, and at that point it just has to be completely intentional. What makes everything even more special is the whole theme of the album, with the music being based around Tchort's experiences with the death of his daughter (which we learned is also the focus of the debut album), and the birth of his son. Lyrically (and we didn't touch on this during the interview), it's more geared towards inspiration from the Botteri brothers (both ex IN THE WOODS, and not appearing on this recording). Not sure exactly what's going on as far as that goes, but there's some classic phrasing. The refrain itself is a total classic:

I fell asleep, to sweet lullaby
A sleep in which I had a dream
And in this dream
I conceived a perfect plan

That would change the face of man

For it was my dream
To create a perfect world
From this cold imperfect world

And all the answers were inside my mind

Relevant and impressive packaging round this thing out. Definitely a big achievement here, and I daresay the best one song album that metal's seen to date. Ambition should always be rewarded, and the successful realization of it needs to be celebrated. This is powerful, awesome stuff. www.green-carnation.de

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SCHOLOMANCE *The Immortality Murder*
8- 50:19 (12- 59:49) The End

There's something just a little bit masochistic about sitting down to review an album when it is appearing right after a five page interview with that same band. Anyway. SCHOLOMANCE is a technical-shred death metal band that has similarities with acts like ATHEIST, CYNIC, *Thresholds* era NOCTURNUS, later DEATH, etc. Guitarist Scott Crinklaw, keyboardist Jimmy Pitts, and bassist Jerry Twyford show absolutely no sense of restraint when it comes to complexity or easy arrangements, creating a soundscape where your average music fan is just going to be completely overwhelmed. Not to say that it's just a million miles an hour shredding at all points, they pull back and calm down quite often (not to say it's ever mellow, more like everyone holding off so it's one guy having the passage to himself), but it's pretty intense the whole time. There's not the almost a complete disregard on their part to be sensible or tasteful or light in their arrangements, so it's not exactly 'prog' as we know it, and why I firmly put SCHOLOMANCE in the extreme metal category. They do use a drum machine, which at times sounds a bit clunky but overall they program it well, fitting to the absolute insanity that the actual people are composing. That all of this was recorded in a week's time, basically and everything is as powerful and clear as it is (remember the not so great sound of their debut?), amazes me and I'm glad that no apologies have to be made on the production. Now I don't want you to get the impression that it's just all a complete mess, and it's just unmemorable shred shred shred. There's are points of melody that can be gleaned, passages of groove that makes it cohesive. They're just scattered, treasures to find, and more often than not happening on one instrument independent of the others. The absolute antithesis of the SIX FEET UNDER style of metal. We metal listeners like to say we're about the music, and more serious about it and take pride in the craftsmanship of 'our' bands, and here's a chance to prove it, as this will take a bit of time. Just as nuts and infathomable as the music itself would be the lyrics and concept of the album. The lyrics were not meant as lyrics we've learned, but just independent poetry, storytelling, and philosophizing. The Immortality Murder concept takes up the first half of the CD, then the second half is made up of four independent songs. The lyrics go from absolutely brutal murder depiction (Matriarch, which is saved from being CANNIBAL CORPSE lameness by the context in which it happens) to more random thought streams as to the nature of the way of things. Pitts' vocals are certainly unique at delivering all of this, a throaty, full sound (multi-tracked and not harmonized, as the CD notes 'there are NO vocal effects used on this recording!'), but at the same time even if it is all his natural throat, there's some studio magic going on), with some of the oddest cadences I've ever heard. I guess that's the result of the lyrics not being written for the music, but independent works being adapted into the song structures. He doesn't get boring, changing the growl and putting actual inflection into the vocals so he's not assign his way through things. He reminds me of a higher pitched Johan Liiva (ex-ARCH ENEMY) in that he's utterly abrasive and almost against the music, but Pitts is much more varied in his approach and SCHOLOMANCE isn't easy listening by any measure anyway. The album does come with a free extra CD that has five of the songs of the album in instrumental form, with no vocals left on whatsoever. This was done purely to help out the people who appreciate the music

but can't stand the extreme vocals at all (pussies! pussies!). Cool gesture, and even cooler is the fact that in between the songs (as well as an intro and outro) there are improvised piano pieces, bringing the second CD to a greater playing time than the first one. That the songs stand as instrumentals is further indicative of the 'show off' factor, but hell, very very few bands can pull this off so it makes sense to celebrate those that can. I find myself singing along with the instrumental CD though. I've been lucky enough to own this album since this past summer. If this album had been officially released 9 days earlier it would have been my #1 album of 2001. It'll be a great year if this doesn't make top 3 in 2002, and one of the greatest year metal music's ever seen to keep it out of the top 10.

www.angelfire.com/sc/scholomance/main.html

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Already Available
WARMACHINE *Demo*
8- 42:14 Independent

Power metal lives on in Canada! For An Eye, Forgotten Demise [this one has THE killer soloing], and Dust to Dust show the lyrical topics are pretty standard metal stuff without being macho or fairyting) is the vocal list (Di Taranto), and even he's not bad as he doesn't attempt to do anything he shouldn't and he generally isn't a factor for or against the band. For an independently produced product, WARMACHINE has gotten a great sound which most signed acts would be pleased to have, so it's real easy to listen to these songs and get into them. In the end, if power metal's not what you're looking for, WARMACHINE won't change your mind, but the material is remarkably mature and far, far worse bands already have record deals and albums on the market. Another band which gives me hope that 'normal' metal is not all used up when it comes to effective bands and songwriting. Their songs are available for download from their website. www.warmachineonline.com

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VADER *Armageddon*
20- 73:03 System Shock

When it comes time to write the book on what death metal is and was, I wonder exactly what VADER's place in there will be. The band's been around since the 80s, coming out of Poland and somehow missing the boat every time when it comes to being a major name in the scene, but for sure recognized by those in the know. They first burst on the scene with 1992's *The Ultimate Incantation*, on the then-almighty Earache Records, and as such were the first signs of Earache's downfall from the extreme metal scene because even though the album was superb, and they got some choice opening slots, their promotion and impact to the scene overall was hurt by Earache's mishandling. Further releases *Sothis* and *De Profundis* expanded upon that but never got a proper Stateside release, so when VADER came out with *Black to the Blind* in 1997, at least on this side of the Atlantic they seemed like a band coming out of nowhere once again in a scene that was considered dead. But those who thought that never actually listened to VADER, who combined skill and songwriting with their complete brutality and utterly inhuman drumming to be something most in death metal could never, ever be: Classy. The lyrics were full of the occult, the songs filled with blast beats, and yet the band's SLAYER meets MORBID ANGEL approach never came across as cheesy, and they never came across as a trend follower. They were leaders.

They are leaders. I'm speaking in past tense, because this album's a 'best of' compilation, summing up VADER to this point, with songs being taken from ALL of their releases so far. The albums, the live album, the demo re-release, the last Metal Blade album, everything. Bits of the full story, including a humorous story from the System Shock label's perspective (who had never heard of death metal before VADER was signed), gives a good picture of what VADER's accomplished up to this point, and why they are important going forward. Now, having the actual albums would be a much better thing (*Ultimate Incantation* and *Black to the Blind* being the best) of course, but some of you aren't going to go grab 11 different CDs, so I'll forgive you this compilation. If you're in to the good death metal (that's not necessarily melodic, not progressive, nothing but an excellent aggressive death metal band). Poland's finest by far. www.vader.pl (Distributed in the US by The End)

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GREY SKIES FALLEN have signed to a new label called Maelstrom Music Group, and their *Tomorrow's in Doubt* album should finally be out in February... Well here's some evidence of hard work, from Oystein G. Brun: "BORKNAGAR is currently working on new material for the next album, still untitled. Most of the material is written with the rough plan for studio time in Autumn '02. We intend to use the same studio and engineer as on *Empiricism*. Musically it will be a continuation of the latest effort", and the label Century Media happily notes "Anticipation is high for the North American release (with bonus multimedia materials) of *Empiricism* on January 22nd featuring new lead singer (and long-time friend) Vintersorg, which will be supported by a summer tour- their first appearance since 1999's Kings Of Terror Tour..." THRESHOLD are currently writing material for their forthcoming studio album. The band plan to record during March and April for a late Spring release, and should be back on the road playing a few European festivals over the summer. Six songs have already been written for the currently untitled album... Some Dark Symphonies news: "Based on the preliminary demo material that is currently circulating around Dark Symphonies, it is easy to see why AUTUMN TEARS will easily set the standard for neo-classical dark wave with their new opus *Eclipse*. Mesmerizing melodies, sweeping orchestration, and soaring vocals are just a few of highlights that await the listener. The band will continue to write and record new material with a release date sometime during the late summer, early autumn of 2002..." "THE RED KING, the neo-classical, dark ambient side project of CORVUS CORAX's mastermind Johann is about to have its debut *Vitriolum* released on Dark Symphonies sometime in late winter, early spring. THE RED KING can also be found on the upcoming *The Botanical Compilation* (including AMBER ASYLUM, COIL, MOON LAY HIDDEN MEMBERS, BLOOD AXIS, etc) being put out by AJNA Records in March. On the comp will include a song off *Vitriolum* entitled Popover Somniforum (Opium Poppy). Rumor has it that Johann's composition is considered the best submission by the very label that is putting it out!"... From Clenched Fist Records: "The debut from PERPETUAL FLAME is currently in production. We should be receiving the CD from the band this month and will have an mp3 up for everyone to check out. The cover art for PERPETUAL FLAME's debut CD, *Subculture Process* is almost done. The artwork was done by none other than Travis Smith (OPETH, NEVERMORE, ICED EARTH, DEATH, DRAGONLORD etc.). Be on the lookout for this up and coming METAL band from Portugal..."

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Reader Comments
From Poland with Love

I have just received the December 9th issue of LotFP. I just wanted to send you a HUGE thank you for reviewing my demo in spite of how different it is from most of the music featured in LotFP. This really means a lot to me. And it's so much more than I expected. Well, I don't care how unprofessional this will sound or if it's suitable to reveal such silly enthusiasm but I have to tell you: it is a real blast to finally, for the first time officially, read a serious review of one's work. "kin Prrinted. ha. Okay, excuse this outpour.

Once again thank you, thank you, THANK YOU. And good luck with the mag.

PS. Funnily enough I've been dabbling with "Book of Thel" before Christmas. Still, I can never do it justice, so I guess it will have to wait till either my confidence or my talent grows a little. Best Wishes,

Gabriela Kulka www.geocities.com/gabrielakulka

Reviewing

Got the issue with the review. First off thanks for sending it. Cool. Anyhow, the review: interesting to say the least. Glad you appreciated what went into the project. Being a graphic artist and activist as well as musician and starving music afficianado, my musical and artistic endeavors generally go off on tangents that share strange symmetry, VIRTUALITY included. The next project, I think will be more 'metal' (huzzah!) but in the same abstract, impressionistic style. Also, your little personal expose on 'reviewing' was quite a cool read. I can dig where you're coming from on that. I didn't agree with everything, but for the most part, I think you were on target dude. Besides, it's your zine, you provide the scene with your viewpoint and it's cool, now if you could include some Asian and African cooking recipes in there, it would be complete. And the weekly issues are a new revelation for us. See you at the next event! Muchos gracias for the support once again.

Scott Mosher

Virtuality (www.theambientmind.com)

AFRICAN VEGETABLE STEW (Serves 4):

1 very large onion, chopped

1 bunch Swiss chard

1 can garbanzo beans 500 g (known also as chick peas, ceci, etc.)

1/2 cup raisins 75 g

1/2 cup uncooked rice 100 g

several fresh tomatoes (or 1 large can 800 g of canned tomatoes)

1 clove garlic (or more to taste)

2 yams

salt and pepper to taste

tabasco sauce to taste

Fry onion, garlic, and white stems of chard until barely limp.

Add chopped greens and fry a bit. Either peel the yams or scrub them well with a vegetable brush, then slice them into thick slices.

Add garbanzos, raisins, yams, tomatoes, salt, and pepper. Cook a couple of minutes. Make a well in the center of the mixture in the pot. Put the rice in the well and pat it down until it's wet. Cover and cook until rice is done, about 25 minutes.

Add Tabasco sauce to taste. I find that the flavors of the vegetables don't stand out unless you put in a lot of tabasco. But then, I've got a cast-iron tongue. You should add enough to make the stew seem spicy to you. Difficulty: easy.

Time: 15 minutes preparation, 30 minutes cooking. Precision: no need to measure.

(from

www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Miscellany/African_Recipes.html)

Subscribe and you get your Asian recipe.

Heya! Just got issue #9 of LOTFP in me mailbox today. Can't say I am able to disagree on ANYTHING you've said concerning the reviewing of CD's. One big note to all reviewers: The best way to review a CD is to pretend you just spent 20 bucks on the thing. Yes, that's right, even if the CD's normally cost 11 - 16 bucks. Pretend it's an import CD, cause the damn thing ain't available domestically. It's hard to do when you get it for free, but remember that while YOU can enjoy a free CD that has three or four good songs, the buyer might not feel so inclined. While we're on the subject (keeping in mind that I'm writing this as if your readers are going to peruse it as well as you), one thing I cannot stand is a reviewer that uses numerics to rate albums and goes by a mathematical equation! For example, a CD has ten songs, only 8 are good so the CD gets an 80. That's so unimaginative it's not even funny! One tough review for me (which will appear in issue #30) was the Green Carnation CD "Light Of Day, Day Of Darkness." There's only one song, so most people think if it sucked, it gets a 0 if it rules it gets a 100. However, with a 60 minute song, I decided to break it down into segments. Without giving the review completely away, let's just say that the middle part of the "song." I totally didn't like the female vocals and saxophone medley. This "piece" occurs for roughly 4 minutes of a 60 minute song. So were I to take a 4 minute piece and percentage it by 60, I'd probably come out with around 6 points (if my math is worth a damn) to remove from an album that was otherwise absolutely brilliant. However, to make a long story short, that album

rated a 98/100. 4 minutes out of 60 to me is a small part of an otherwise great record. Anyone who does it "strictly by the numbers" is cheating not only themselves, but the readers. art and music cannot be graded strictly by a mathematical formula. Besides that, my only other complaint is that your link to my web site is still inaccurate! It's all at: <http://vibrationsofdoom.com>. While yer there, check out the classic albums section, and listen to many rare, classic and out of print 80's metal albums in their entirety. See how many you can identify.

Steve Cannon

Vibrations of Doom

Hope this finds you well! Thanks for the newsletter! Really great "10 Commandments of Record Reviewing" article. Pretty much throughout the whole thing I was saying to myself "Exactly!", because the way I usually try to go about reviewing is, "If I didn't get this for free, would I buy this?". Because I know before I did a zine, I quite often went by which album received what review in a certain zine. Not everyone has the luxury of getting music for free, and your right when you say it is our job to do something for the record companies in return. They are not sending them to us for their health. The notion of "Would I re-buy this promo if I lost it?" is a good one, and one that I am actually now having to put into effect, since my promo of the new SONATA ARCTICA album (in my opinion the best new power metal band I've heard since I can't remember), is scratched, and I need to now buy a new one! It's also true that if a CD comes from a certain genre that I either dislike or know nothing about, I tend to pass it off to someone who does. For example, whenever I receive progressive stuff such as the new James LaBrie's MULLMUZZLER disc, I pass it off, because, apart from certain exceptions like ELEGY, EVERGREY (LOVE them! Total Gods!), old FATES WARNING, DREAM THEATER, parts of the SPIRAL ARCHITECT CD (gets boring after a while) and some of Dan Swano's stuff (ODYSSEY, the first NIGHTINGALE album, and parts of his solo record) etc, I generally don't know/care to know/enjoy prog rock/metal, so I pass it off. It's just not a style of music that really hits me most of the time. Trying to be impartial is also important to me. I try to be as honest as I can with reviews, regardless of the consequences of "no more promos". Many a time have I ripped apart a band/album which I think sucks, even though it's a "high priority release" by a "legend" in the scene. Examples of this are my reviews of NEUROSIS (a band who I think is pretentious, untalented and fucking boring), MORBID ANGEL (haven't put out a good album since Vincent left the band, with the only 2 GREAT ones being the debut and Blessed...), MORTICIAN, SKINLESS, CATHEDRAL (who I fucking ADORE, but *Endtime* just kind of left me cold at points) etc... Another example is the fact that I dig both AVERNUS (who were in issue 1) and SINERGY (who will be featured in issue 5 of Unhallowed). Now, I know of the rumors and stories about what has went on between AVERNUS and Kim Goss, and I have been in contact with the AVERNUS guys since their demo, but I need to stay impartial, because I dig both bands. I don't know what happened, and it isn't any of my business, truthfully. All I know is that I've had great interviews with bands, and I dig both of their recorded output. Ok man, just wanted to let you know I'm diggin' the newsletter, and to say "good job". Keep it up, and best of luck to you.

MetalGeorge

Unhallowed www.unhallowed.net

Dale here from Canadian Assault... Overall I have to tell you I find pretty pompous to tell other reviewers how to review. I mean making a comment on how other reviewers are is cool and saying these are guidelines I see as important when reviewing a record. Not making some kind of fucking holier than thou "10 Commandments" and basically telling all reviewers this is how you HAVE to do it! What the hell is that? I admit I even agree with many of your points, making honest reviews no matter who your friends are or what the situation, putting in your own strong opinions (I mean it drives me crazy when I see people reviewing like they are a hockey referee like they are impartial or some shit), and listening to at least one time fully at the minimum. I fully agree with all of those. Now I have to tell them how perfect the quality is? Fuck that! Many forms of extreme metal sound far better with rawer or on the cusp of being bad sound. I have heard some bands like this get a pristine production and it absolutely ruined it, it became all candy coated, robotic and boring. The crystal production and fine tuning destroyed their record! For most of the metal I listen to I prefer a rawer and dirtier sound. Except possibly when it comes to certain death metal bands and most power metal bands. 9 times out of 10 I

cannot be bothered with a bands lyrics, sorry I could care less unless it is maybe some well done gore, occultic material or if it is old VENOM or any KING DIAMOND stuff. Otherwise I could care less about their opinions, preaching, fantasy wizard tales, etc. People know if they buy my zine and want to hear about lyrics they better go elsewhere. Actually that is all I'm going to say the rest is obviously very subjective but you telling other reviewers not how they should write but how they MUST write is ridiculous, do you have a hard time fitting your ego in the room with you? Also well we are at it a while back a friend of mine pointed out I should read your JUDAS PRIEST review on the newest record... I was pretty surprised a guy who has not been into metal that long and a guy who just discovered the old power metal classics a couple years ago, give or take a day is telling the old diehards they have no right to criticize the new JP? I got my first Priest record close to 20 years ago and have been supporting them and following them over the years and some fucking punk who hasn't been into them long enough for his coffee to get cold telling me what I can and cannot judge upon with the band? I mean this coming from a guy who reviewed an immortal classic like *Powerslave* after just getting into power metal and giving it a mediocre review is an insult to the whole metal scene! I seen you put your age in the one issue and it is not like you are some 14 year old kid who doesn't know any better, you are old enough to have been into it a whole lot sooner. ... Do not ever tell the old veterans who have led for this scene for decades what they can and cannot think about a band whose legend they followed and as a loyal supporter helped build over the years!... Anyway thanks for sending the newsletter and here's to hoping you wake up and start giving true support to the scene instead of trying to undermine it!

Dale Roy

Canadian Assault <http://canadianassault.cjb.net>

*Well, some of that is still some stupidity I'm paying for from LotFP mag #2 which was released February 1999, can't do much about that now, but hey, anyone reading then and now hopefully knows the difference, and some of those stupid things from my past are what inspired some of the 'Commandments.' As far as the JUDAS PRIEST thing, I have all the albums (except *Rocka Rolla*), and as far as I'm concerned, having the albums, knowing the albums, whether it's from the past two years or the past three years, gives me the right to have every bit an opinion with no apologies. JUDAS PRIEST has made a career off of taking from popular trends, from the NWOBHM, to a bit of glam, to thrasher stuff, to PANTERA, and to expect something different now is just absolutely insane.*

Read with interest the proposal you lay forth. Like yourself, I'm someone who's trying to stretch the educational base of the people reading reviews, in terms of music, as well as vocabulary, culture, world history etc. I am in tune with most of what you have to say. Being 'in the game' for almost twenty years now, I agree that the proliferation of the Web and zines has watered down the quality of writing, but they still serve a purpose, for a certain cliental, so don't judge them too harshly. If that were the only means people had to get their info (free sources, online or print), people wouldn't be subscribing to the mags like the ones I work for, getting LotFP or your newest adventure. The quality of writing and authority which we (without sounding egotistical) wield is obviously worth something. You know as well as I that labels and publicists don't hold everyone in the same regard, hence certain people are quoted in ads and on CD covers. They know the 'good' from the 'mediocre' and 'experts' in their respective fields. The main point you stress should never (aside: a wise person once said, 'Never say never') be underestimated: that we write for the fans and have a responsibility to THEM. The process should not be about seeing our own name in print (as intoxicating as that can be, initially), or getting into shows, or being 'better' than someone else because you're 'famous' (in whatever circles you run). A quick visit to any of the metal bulletin boards quickly reveals some self-appointed authority shouting down opposing views from their own musical beliefs (propaganda and hate speech, on the other hand, are not first amendment rights). I stand by most of what you've said and add my own personal credo, when it comes to rating records: there are no 10s, or at least I haven't heard one yet. If ten is the perfect score, then once I've seen/heard it, all else will fail in comparison. The world of 'heavy metal' embraces too many diverse cultures and musical elements to have any single representation as 'perfect.' There are many near perfect albums, depending upon ones' personal tastes, but no universal constant, at least in my world. The search continues.

Mark Gromen

Brave Words and Bloody Knuckles/Metal Maniacs

LotFP Weekly #13 JANUARY 15, 2002

There are some albums in this world that are pretty good. There are albums which are pretty good for a specific style. Then, there are the albums that are great for a style. Some albums do manage to just be great. The album I'm thinking is just great music, across any genre (yeah, like I'm such an expert on all music everywhere, hah), would be NOVEMBRE's Novembrine Waltz. What makes this better is I've been following the band for quite some time, and they've always been great, always been creative, but as true creativity was working it's way into the metal scene, NOVEMBRE seemed to be falling in with the pack. Novembrine Waltz destroys any notions that NOVEMBRE was going to be a casualty of the metal wars. It is a massive album, eclipsing their previous work by large margins and looks forward with a daring attitude. I recently was able to speak with singer, guitar player, and songwriter Carmelo Orlando once again (first interview conducted last year is on the website). Thanks to Gerrit Mohr of Century Media Europe for setting me up even though I'm out of his territory! Anyway, here's what we talked about...

How are you doing?

Resting a bit after a lot of touring which has been a little bit stressing, even if it was funny.

What it is the weather like in the middle of winter where you are?

This winter is really strange. They say it's going to be one of the coldest in 30 years. Very low temperatures, it's about zero degrees Celsius. It's not so usual for Italy.

Any snow down there?

Not in town, but there's snow right outside the town in the hills.

The new album, *Novembrine Waltz*, is absolutely incredible. I have it pegged in the top three of the year. Woah. Thank you.

Your other albums are good, but this one blew me away. What the hell did you do this time?

The reasons why this album came out a little bit different from the other one is mostly because this time we were more relaxed. *Classica* was the first album on a big label, so we were really excited and a little bit nervous. We didn't want to disappoint anyone. Not the label, the people buying the album. The album came out really good with the songs, but we were afraid to dare, if you know what I mean. With the second one, it's different. We wanted to dare, as we always did since *Wish I Could Dream it Again* and *Arte Novecento*. This time we were more relaxed and we said now we do what we want. We let the music guide everything, and it came out *Novembrine Waltz*.

This album doesn't seem to be getting a US release by Century Media either. That's really a shame. It's the best album they've put out anywhere this year! But in Europe you got the best tour possible for you, but as far as general promotion, how is it over there?

I haven't seen so much about magazines, but they did a good job in my opinion. I don't if it is the best job they can make. They did advertisements, a whole page color in many of the most important magazines, or a whole page with us and BORKNAGAR and CARNAL FORGE. I think they are doing the normal job. I'm not really sure if they are doing the best for the album but they're doing the best for what they usually do. We had the chance to go on this tour. It was good because everyone that is into bands like OPETH and KATATONIA can easily like our music. It was much better than going out with bands like MOONSPELL, which is different. OPETH is a really big band right now, and in many venues people couldn't get in because there were too many people. I knew they were big, but I didn't know they were so big. We had the chance to play in front of more people! We had fun, really, we are friends with OPETH and KATATONIA since 10 years, and we had a chance to spend one more together. We've been helping each other a lot, KATATONIA played one song called Brave from Brave Murder Day, and Jonas [Renske] didn't feel like singing that song, and I sang the song. That was really fun. That's what happened in Germany, Mikael [Akerfeldt] had

problems with the vocals, and instead of canceling the concert, we helped him. I sang Advent, Anders [Nystrom] from KATATONIA sang Forest of October, and Jonas sang Credence. My brother sang Demon of the Fall. It's really difficult to sing an OPETH song. It's not that easy.

One thing's that really improved this time is the clean vocals. What did you do?

I don't think I'm a proper singer. Those people that are able to sing by the will of God! For me, it's really difficult. My brother is a sound engineer, and I need him to say "Repeat it. Repeat it." Until everything is perfect. This time, we had more time to rehearse, and concentrate and my brother has been really severe, so that's why it came out so good. We didn't want this time any out of tune shit. The previous album I had some parts I don't really like. It's because of my brother, mainly.

The one song that stands out on the first listen is the Kate Bush cover song. You become almost another band to do that song. That's unusual. It's a risk to do something like that.

I'm not 100% satisfied with the way the cover came out. We wanted to try to do something different from the normal things. That song is one of the things which influenced my life. That song was number one on the charts in 1985, I was 11 and I always listened to that song so many times. I was crazy for that song and I wanted to pay a tribute. My brother agreed. He was also crazy for that song. I wanted to sing along with Ann-Marie Edvardsen, but finally we decided to let her sing. In my mind, it should have come out differently. We prefer to pay tribute to bands who really influenced our music, and not to bands like IRON MAIDEN or METALLICA or whatever just because they are metal. We didn't care if the people knew that song or not, or what they would think. The only thing I'm a bit disappointed with is the way it came out. I really imagined it in a different way. The vocals of Ann-Marie are perfect. It's not a matter of performance, it's the final mix that disappointed me a little bit.

Sounded fine to me. I'll admit I'm not at all familiar with the original. It's a success on the album because on the album it's completely different and lets you know the original artist was a completely different style.

That's one of the reasons I'm not satisfied. In my mind, it should have been more similar to our style. A little bit like the DEPECHE MODE cover we had on the second album.

How did you get Ann-Marie to do the vocals on that?

That was quite funny. I didn't have any contact with her. I spent one night on the search engines on the internet writing down her name. I found so many Norwegian sites of classical music, opera, and theaters in the Norwegian language. I didn't understand a word. I wrote down some telephone number and I just tried the day after and I called them telling them I was looking for Ann-Marie Edvardsen. Some kind people said "OK, you can call her at this number..." I was lucky. I had just called a theater because she's singing opera, she's no more in her band. I was lucky. I asked her, and she just said yes. That was quite easy.

You say she's no longer with THIRD AND THE MORTAL. Any idea what is going on with them?

The album is going to be out soon. They finished the recording and they have the release date [*Memoirs* will be released in February on Norway's VME.]. They have three new female vocalists. I'm looking forward to hearing something.

What's happening with your lineup? I know there's been some changes.

It's been a bit messy. The bass player from *Classica*, unfortunately he had to leave to another town, Milan, which is really far from Rome. It's in the extreme north of Italy. The distance was too much. Fortunately we met this guy named Demien Cristiani. We knew him for a lot of years and didn't know he could play bass. We get along and we have fun together. With Massimiliano [Paglioso], everything fucked up this summer when we were recording the album. We were really stressed and nervous for many reasons, because of deadlines and my brother had to have surgery for his back. He came out of the

hospital and was fine, but a lot of shit happened and we were really nervous. Sometimes we argued for stupid things, we'd say "Fuck you, I don't want to talk to you again." But afterwards we met and started to talk again, and we solved our stupid problems so he came back in the band soon after and he also joined us on the tour. He's back in the band. We've been a little bit childish.

I would guess this past year you've toured more than you've ever toured before. I'm wondering if that will affect the music on the next album since you're a touring band now.

Maybe, maybe. We are learning that it's very difficult to play everything on stage, everything you can do in the studio. Maybe we'll try to make the songs more similar from studio to stage in order to avoid samples and everything.

Bands that are more intricate and have more things going on are better to listen to at home, and I'm wondering where the tradeoff is in having a quality studio project that someone's going to live with and have forever, versus material that you can do on stage that someone sees one night of their life.

I don't think we're going to make easy, simple songs because we're going to play live. We will try to find the right balance. You're right, our music is good to listen to at home, it's very nice to listen to all the things we put in the studio. Extra guitars, extra keyboards, and other stuff. We are not going to conceal all this, to erase all this. We just want to find a nice balance in order to play everything live and not disappoint the people. You will still find the good atmospheres you are used to on the albums.

As far as what's on the album, tell me about the song Everasia. I think that's the best song on the album.

Everasia is the most particular song because there's a lot of folk influences in it typical of south Italy. The lyrics are kind of a mental and geographical travel from the Mediterranean Sea to the Middle East and up to Asia. It's a little bit like Marco Polo's travels, but it's more like fantasy. It's not real. I write about sensations and feelings about this. It's a daydream about places which are far from here. The music came out to be so folk, so the music inspired me to write things like that.

The other song for me that stands out is Conservatory Resonance.

That song is really a closing song. It's slow and depressive. The lyrics is a ghost story. It's the story of someone who still wanders in an abandoned conservatory and he hasn't realized that he's passed away.

What kind of mood do you get into to write the music and lyrics?

When I write the music, the spine of the songs, I'm usually at home at night with the classical guitar. I'm concentrated on the music and I let the music guide myself... I'm sorry, it's a bit difficult to express myself tonight! Talking about the music, and the lyrics is difficult in Italian, so you can imagine in another language!

How do you manage to get the English lyrics down then?

That's different. You have dictionaries, and other things.

With you guys, your lyrics make sense. The words and lines go together. I've seen Italian bands where the words are just horrible.

I'm used to English, to written English. I really love the lyrics of other bands. I really can't say for the other bands, but for me it's not a problem to write lyrics. You get to think about it twice! And you can correct everything! I know some people from England and they can help me out.

When somebody creates an album as great as what you've done here, I have to wonder what made you become a musician in the first place? Why create music instead of just listening?

In the beginning, I didn't want to be a musician ten years ago. My brother asked me to form a band. I said no! It made no sense, and I didn't want to. But then he asked me a couple of times and I reflected and said why not? I think it's something you have inside, a little voice you have in your mind which says 'OK, now you have to write music.' It's a little bit like priests and nuns, there's this voice from God or something. You just do it, even if your

plans for life are different. I never wanted to be a musician! It's just something you do and you don't know why. Even if you don't get money. We don't actually earn money on the band, so it actually makes no sense to be a musician! You could just do something else and make lots of money and just play for yourself in your spare time. But it's music itself that tells me, "You have to play." The music wants to get into this reality through the musicians. I really feel to be a sort of slave. The music is a master that says what I have to do. Sometimes it's fine, sometimes it's not as good. Sometimes I really think I'm stupid to do what I'm doing. Oh God, I'm 28, I should do something different! There are possibilities that tomorrow we could get bigger and start to earn some money, but maybe not, and what do you do then? It's kind of foolish. It's something that completely takes up my time. I wouldn't have the time to do something else, because of interviews, because of this and that. It absorbs all the time.

One thing that you did on the CD that I love is put the list of bands and musicians on there. I wish more bands would do things like that. When I first got into metal, the first album I bought had this giant list just like that and for people just picking up something, if they're new to the scene, that's just great. And it's great that you put a lot of non metal bands in there.

I would be a liar otherwise! I did it because in Italy, we are quite big here. We have a lot of people writing us, there are a lot of people at the shows, and a lot of people ask me my influences, and what I like to listen to, and every time I have to repeat myself. This time, I wanted to write it down! And I wanted it to be really complete. For instance, I'm a huge fan of U2, and I'd really like to know what they listen to, because I'm interested. I would discover new music which I didn't know before. So new kids might read my favorite bands and get interested and get interested in that band.

Although somebody's in for a surprise if they look at this list and go buy a NAPALM DEATH CD!

Yeah yeah! But it explains sometimes why the drums go so fast!

I notice in the list you put the GOBLIN in your list. Have you heard the latest RHAPSODY? They take the main theme from the movie Phenomena and adapt it into a Rhapsody song.

I haven't heard it, but that sounds interesting. I'll check it out. But I don't really like that kind of music, to be honest. In the list of music I have, there's no HELLOWEEN, you know? I've never been a fan of power metal. It's not that I dislike it, but I'm not crazy for it. But I'm really happy that RHAPSODY is so big. I'm happy for them.

I do have a question about one other band on your list here. NECRODEATH! How is their earlier stuff? Honestly I haven't liked the later stuff they've done.

I don't think I'm going to be objective. For me, talking about NECRODEATH is the same as talked about KREATOR or DESTRUCTION or SODOM. I don't know, I think it's the best metal ever! The first two albums for me are they same as *Pleasure to Kill* or *Master of Puppets* or *Reign in Blood*! Every time I listen to it I go crazy! I go back in time and start moshing through the house! I'm so glad they're back together. I wish they could have gotten bigger back at that time because they deserved it.

I have a feeling that this album wasn't necessarily written as a metal album, but just turned out that way as the songs needed. How important is it for you for NOVEMBRE to actually be metal?

It's quite important. This is our scene. Our label is metal, our scene is metal, I mostly listen to metal, even if our influences are very [diverse]. I'm not able to play something that is not metal. We'll still remain a metal band in the attitude, in the looks, we're still longhaired guys, and whatever we play we still bang our heads! We feel comfortable in metal. It's still the best thing, the best scene, the best attitude I think. We wouldn't be able to pass from one thing to another, it wouldn't be natural, and it would turn out to be something not good. The people wouldn't like it, and we wouldn't like it. It wouldn't make sense.

Tell me about the artwork. Travis Smith did the artwork. When dealing with an artist that has a big name in metal right now, how much control do you have over the artwork he does?

That's quite strange. When I got in touch with him, I didn't have any idea he was so big. Really! I really thought he was a 20 year old guy just casually discovered by OPETH and KATATONIA! I didn't know he worked for DEATH or SADUS or NEVERMORE. I didn't know that! He did good covers for OPETH and KATATONIA and so I wanted to try him out. When I saw the list of bands he'd worked with, God! So many, so many! It's unbelievable. I just wrote him an email saying "Hi, we're NOVEMBRE and we'd like to work with you." He said he already knew us and had our albums! Whoa! That's strange! It's still great to work with him. He always asks what do we mean by certain lyrics or a title, what's in our minds. What kind of vision it evokes. From this he makes out something. He works a lot with the band, which is good because not so many people work like this.

I notice you have your first two albums available for download on the net in their entirety [at www.mp3.com/novembre. And for the record, since the band did it themselves, of course I've got no issue with that.] Why do that instead of a proper re-release?

I don't know. I just thought it was a good idea. It's for free, and it's good to have albums for free. I would be really happy if more bands would do it like this. Maybe we will reprint it someday, or remix it, just correcting some mistakes. I don't think it's a good idea to just reprint it. The first album is completely sold out. I just have my copy and that's it! When people ask me about it I don't know what to say. Now they can download it from there. I like it, I like the music, but there are some things I really dislike.

We're about to the end of what I have to talk about. Any final words you have for the American reading audience?

Try to be patient, try to get the album some way, and I hope we'll have the albums printed in the USA soon. Keep listening to the true music, to true metal. And fuck nu metal! <laughs>

NOVEMBRE Discography

Wish I Could Dream It Again (1995 Polyphemus)

Arte Novecento (1996 Polyphemus)

Classica (2000 Century Media)

Novembrine Waltz (2001 Century Media)

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*Triumphing True Metal was the name of TWISTED TOWER DIRE's final demo before getting signed, and I can hardly think of a more fitting epithet. Well, Triumphant, maybe, but let's gloss over that. The point is, in this day and age of cookie cutter power metal, people are looking at things from the wrong perspective. Power metal is not a throwback to the 80s. Your GAMMA RAYs, your STRATOVARIOUSes, and the like certainly have their roots in the 80s, but it's not the same. Tell me Land of the Free or Visions wouldn't have stuck out, tremendously, from everything going on in 1985 or so? But out there in the underground, there are bands that are absolutely 80s throwbacks, by design. TWISTED TOWER DIRE is indeed one of those bands. Not 80s worship, mind you, but completely 80s in spirit and in sound. I recently got the new album *The Isle of Hydra*, and it was such an improvement over the debut, I needed to know more. I got in touch with the guitar player, Scott Waldrop, and set up a phone call shortly thereafter...*

TWISTED TOWER DIRE is a band that's been around a lot of years. If you could go through the boring part, the history of the band?

Oh yes, the band history section. We started back in 95, and we released two demos, and a couple of split EPs for the debut. We were supposed to put the first one out on

Near Dark Productions, but they were dicking us around so Rich [Walker] from the band SOLSTICE started up his own label called Miskatonik and put out the first album for us. The album did well and the label took off so we did our second one with them. Hellion in Germany has picked that up as well. So we have the American and UK version, and then the European version. It's doing pretty well for us so far.

As far as the early days, you had a lot of lineup changes, and at one point, a female vocalist.

Yeah. We went through two guitarists before we ended up with Dave [Boyd], our current guitarist, he's been with us for like five years now so he's been around most of the time. We really haven't changed that much as far as the infrastructure of the band, which is Marc [Stauffer] and I, he's the drummer. We acquired Tony [Taylor] on vocals right after Janet [Rubin] left in 98 I believe to go over to Germany to do the opera stuff, and she's still there. We just got a new bass player, Mike [billed as Mike Mushroom on the website- ed], he replaced Jimmy [Murad] who also started the band with me.

So you just missed the heavy metal with female opera vocals big boom, huh?

<laughs> Yeah. I think I'm pretty glad we avoided that! No offense to Janet, but...

As far as the first album, but it just wasn't the music, but the production and everything, it sounds like it's from another time, a complete time warp. The new album's a lot cleaner in the production, but what were the goals for that first album?

We definitely set off to get that early Iron Maiden feel to it, but that also might have been an excuse to get a crappy production. We financed it out of our own pockets, Miskatonik was just starting out as a label so they were going to press it for it, and we were going to have to pay for the recording. We did what we could with the money. I didn't know as much as I did now as far as producing stuff. It was pretty much by Marc and I. The engineer we had wasn't the best over there, but we worked with what we could work with and got what we got. The new album is 100% better as far as the production concerns, and that's definitely a standard we're going to live up to from now on. Having a crappy production was not intentional, but it did lend itself to that early 80s vibe so it did work in our favor.

Another thing that immediately stands out is that you guys put yourselves on the album covers. What's up with that?

Tony wrote the lyrics to the title track [on the debut] about a clan that burned a witch, and what better faces to put burning the witch than our own? We lived up to that early 80s MANOWAR effect, and the tradition goes on for the new album. It's all for metal!

You have the Martin Hanford artwork on the new one. I'm surprised he doesn't do more metal stuff than he does.

Rich kind of had to twist his arm to do it. He was really cool about it, he did it for beer money. Probably the equivalent to two hundred American dollars, maybe four tops. He pretty much does it to be cool, he's friends with Rich and we're definitely going to use him again.

Your band definitely has the entire classic metal feel going on, and there's not much in the way of modern influences going on. Why that style for the band? What are you doing now that wasn't already accomplished in the 'glory days' of metal?

It's more or less what's not being done now, is the way I look at it. I've been listening to metal since I was like seven years old. My brother and sister would bring it around me and I got into it at a really young age. The way metal's progressed, to me there's a whole lot of stuff missing in the whole female keyboards and vocals going on. I like IRON MAIDEN. I'm an IRON MAIDEN fan, old MOTLEY CRUE. I'm stuck in 1984. That's what I want to hear, that's the kind of music I like to write. Pretty much nothing more to it than that.

So when you're writing your songs, how do you keep away from the blatant plagiarism that some bands have done. I'm sure you've heard the band WOLF, some of that stuff sounds note for note like old IRON MAIDEN.

We've got tons of influences. We've got enough influences, it's a melting pot. I think that's where we forge our sound. But there are so many great metal songs out there that haven't been written yet. You don't have to do something that's completely original for it to be outstanding. You don't have to do something as radical as VOIVOD did to make good music that's worthy of listening to.

With how metal's progressed, do you just not like it, or do you feel it's just something's missing that you're trying to keep?

The spirit of metal has gotten, it's weird, it's like, where are we now with metal? The stuff that I'm into is back when it was exciting. I look around now, I know trends are delayed over here in America, we got the black metal trend that had caught on and now it's fizzled out, the doom metal that was big in the early 90s has transformed into this goth shit. It's all just about the fact that there's no traditional feeling anymore. I listen to stuff that sounds like the GATHERING, and there's so much of it out there, it's like the GATHERING which was this weird and freaky little underground band has spawned an entire legion of bands. I think the GATHERING is cool, I love the GATHERING, but I don't want to hear a thousand GATHERING clones or a thousand DARK THRONE clones. And at the same time I don't want to hear a thousand JUDAS PRIEST clones either but there's a definite formula for metal, and for it to be considered metal, people should hold true to it. This is just my opinion but it's pretty much IRON MAIDEN!

You've said it's that 1984 metal feeling you want, but what is it about it that drives you there, versus any other kind of music or time period for metal?

If you want to talk on a psychological level, it must be reverting to childhood, the whole nostalgic thing. To be honest, I've been into it since I was a kid, and it was my starting point and I never diverged too much from the path. I discover new bands, well not new bands but bands from that era I'm just getting into now, and it's still my favorite things to listen to. I don't know, who can put their finger on what makes Dio and Ozzy so great? I think it's because the music was written when metal was just fresh and new. It was all milk and honey at that time. A magic that's intangible in that music.

How old are you now?

25.

You're a couple of years younger than me but I didn't get into things until way later. But when I go back to 80s metal, I can hear a lot of things I really like that is missing now.

I really got into death metal too at that age, that's when I got into the underground. That has a lot to do with my style as well. I got into the whole thing, but IRON MAIDEN was just a constant for me. All the old stuff, Ozzy, Dio, and I never stopped playing music like that. I played with a death metal band for a little while but just went back to the metal roots even before this whole thing broke out. It never materialized into much because we were all a bunch of punk teenagers. I wasted most of my high school years with a bunch of retards before I got serious about playing music.

One thing I notice now, is a lot of people into the more traditional forms of metal seem to be against the idea of commerciality in metal. Yet in metal's heyday, IRON MAIDEN and Ozzy and Dio and the rest sold in the millions. And these days, any metal bands, it doesn't matter who it is, that started selling millions, it doesn't matter who it is, would be treated by the underground like they're not metal at all.

Listen to the new METALLICA, some of their new songs aren't bad rock songs, but you have to compare to what METALLICA was doing. It all depends on one person's perceptions as to what metal is. Do you have any one particular band you're talking about?

What I'm thinking is that CRADLE OF FILTH just signed to Sony. If they keep their sound, I understand some people don't like their style, but people are trying to completely cast them out altogether. And SLIPKNOT. I don't like them, but when I hear their songs, I hear metal. And people don't want to admit that.

Well Rolling Stone's calling them death metal. I didn't even realize that Rolling Stone knew what death metal was, and I have to admit I'm a bit sickened that they're using the term. Who's Rolling Stone to say what death metal is? But you're always going to have that. GREEN DAY was a punk band, they got big and everyone said they sold out. It's just a conscious decision every band has to make to be successful. I could really care less, I don't see us being in that situation anyway so I don't ponder it too much.

Where do you think metal went right or wrong, depending on your view, in getting out of the arenas to being in the clubs... well not even in the clubs so much anymore but now just in people's own homes now?

Grunge definitely happened to metal. Before that, hair metal happened to metal, coming out of LA, and that kind of fucked up metal. But old MOTLEY CRUE came out of there and I thought that was cool. There are so many variables and different ways to look at it. But you'll always have underground freaks. For this reason, and this reason alone, I don't think metal's ever going to have a problem. Even when IRON MAIDEN was huge, they didn't sell anything from MTV. Metal and what I consider to be metal thrives on being unpopular, it has its own family. I think that's the way it should be.

And now going off the track of the interview... You guys have got a cool logo. Who came up with that?

I've been painting it all freaking day long. The new bass player just made a banner for us which is really cool but it's banana yellow. I drew that logo back in high school. I probably did it on the back of a math test or something. Thank you! I got the idea out of a Celtic art book, it had the Celtic alphabet, basically the regular Greek alphabet we use, but I saw those, drew the lacework around it and voila!

As far as the album goes, we already talked a bit about the cover, but as far as the name *The Isle of Hydra*, why that name and why that imagery in general?

We try to keep with the whole mythical thing because we're all really into that. That's really the only song off the album that's really epic in that sense. Tony uses a lot of double entendres in his lyrics, as a matter of fact all of his lyrics are like double entendres pertaining to his actual life. He's swayed away from that a little bit but The Isle of Hydra is about a bunch of raiders that go to this Greek island called Hydra. There's a dragon there and they have to slay the dragon and come home healthy. It's not about the actual mythical creature the hydra because there's not eight heads on it.

As far as the songwriting on the new album, I think *The Dagger's Blade* is definitely my favorite. I love the vocal parts in the chorus there. What's your favorite song off the album there?

I actually love Ride the Night. I don't plan on really writing more songs like that, but it's got a great vibe to it. Dagger's Blade is one of my favorites too. I wrote that riff right when we got back from Europe last summer. There was all kinds of band problems at that time. We worked through and it sounds ridiculous to say this but you actually hear that in the song. The song is totally TTD, and the fact that song came out and sounded so good might have been the reason the band didn't break up at that time.

I have a question with the *Dying Breath* song. It's a ballad on the album, but frankly, and I don't know if you're going to shoot me when I say this, but that kind of reminded me of the ballad at the end of the first HAMMERFALL album.

What?

The way the album flows and then ends in the ballad the way the HAMMERFALL album does. I'm not saying it sounds like a HAMMERFALL song. But on the CD there's another song after that that's not listed?

Oh, Beyond the Gate, it's an old demo song we re-recorded and put on as a hidden track. It was originally done with Janet singing. But I don't know, but it wasn't a conscious decision to sound like HAMMERFALL.

<laughs>

If you're talking to a metal band, the last thing you want to say is that something sounds like HAMMERFALL...

It's too late in the game to even bother picking on HAMMERFALL anymore.

I still like their first album.

I've talked enough shit about them. I'm done.

There isn't a ballad on the first album. Is this ballad thing going to be a standard in the band?

I don't know. That was the brainchild of Tony and I, and so of course every other member of the band is turning their nose up at it. "You guys put a ballad on our album, you fuckers!" I don't know if they really feel that way but I'm pretty good friends with Dave and Marc and I'm going to go ahead and assume they think that way. Tony and I do have another idea like that. You know the band BRAVE?

Oh yeah!

We're friends with those guys and we're actually going to have Michelle [Loose, LotFP's #1 Female Vocalist of 2001-ed] come on the album. Top secret information that I'm revealing right now because I'm drinking. They're actually going to be playing my wedding in June. We're still working on the song, we'll see what happens. But there's all sorts of experimentation on the first CD. There wasn't so much on this one, I think I'd like to go back and try more experimental stuff on the third album because I'm really into shit like PINK FLOYD and stuff. I know it's not particularly metal. I just love tinkering around the studio with all the crap.

Half of metal these days seems to be influenced by PINK FLOYD.

Well I'm not going to go off into space rock or anything. It's always going to be Iron Maiden for metal.

Yeah, on the first album I did notice the arrangements were bigger and more winding. It was more normal songwriting on the new one. What is the perfect balance?

Well we didn't write the first one with Tony so much as the second one. If you want to talk good songwriting formulas, look at the BEATLES! Really, it's really working with the vocalist, and not just sitting in the basement drinking beer and smoking pot with the bassist, and writing a thousand riffs and gluing them together with the proverbial fucking Elmer's bottle of metal glue. Which is pretty much what we did. I pretty much wrote all the stuff with Tony for the second album and it's developing more. Most bands out there probably write stuff with the vocalist and we pretty much wrote stuff without the vocalist on the first album. Tony just came in and sang over it.

OK, so you've been over to Europe, your label's European, and you're in the States. You've probably got a better view on how traditional metal is in Europe versus how it is here. Just for the underground level band, how is it in Europe versus here?

The people in Germany are really fanatical about their metal, which is cool, and in Europe geographically things are really close. Here in America, all of the metal bands are all over the place. SKULLVIEW, SLOUGH FEG, the bands in New York, if you want a festival in America it's a huge deal getting everyone together. The German dates were small but intense. Wacken had tons of people, of course. The clubs in Germany I'd say is just a little bit better than they are in America, but the people are way more intense about it.

Is England really as bad as the US as far as this style's popularity?

Yes. One word answer! There's really nothing in England except for SOLSTICE. Which is weird, England created it! England does whatever the US does. England's not kind to power metal at all. Germany, Italy, and Greece, those are the big places. Or Japan. It's not bad over here. We have a pretty good scene up here. It's worth getting out of the house to play.

How far do you think you can take it as far as popularity, and what's it going to take to get there?

It depends on whatever the people at the magazines and the people with the money decide what's cool. I'm doing my own thing. We'll stick with the smaller labels, unless we get a better deal. You have to take into consideration

if you get a bigger record deal, are they going to rape you? Is it going to be more trouble than it's worth? I'm into it because I like playing music, I like writing music, I like everything involved in it. I want to be as successful as possible, which to me means as many people hearing my music as possible. You have to make sure the line between that and keeping your integrity isn't blurred, which is important for any artist or musician.

When you saw the cover painting, did you think you needed a suit of that armor?

No, but I thought the fucking grin on my face was a little bit... I guess it looks like me. I'm a little bit pissed off that I got the green outfit, I don't want to look like a fucking leprechaun! I don't know if we're going to dress like that on stage. I hope we don't get our balls busted about that!

Well that's basically all I have. Anything else you want to say to the reading public?

Thanks for the interview, we've got cheap ass T-shirts for sale. We're trying to get rid of the ones we have right now. Stay metal!

TWISTED TOWER DIRE Discography

The Curse of Twisted Tower (1999 Miskatonik)

The Isle of Hydra (2001 Miskatonik)

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SCHOLOMANCE has let me know that The End Records isn't going to have the bonus instrumental CDs in future pressings, so when buying or ordering the CD in the future, be aware of which version you'll be getting... Some news about Elitist Records (division of Earache): "Elitist Records, the new division of Earache, are very honoured to be able to announce the signing of Russia's fantastic FOREST STREAM. The band is presently working on their as-yet untitled debut album for release later in the year. Taking elements of black metal and doom, Forest Stream composes melodic, atmospheric and heartfelt epics of the highest possible standard. Take a listen to the track Mel Kor from their demo here to see what we mean: www.mp3.com/foreststream"... "Elitist's debut release, the astonishing *Rephormula* by state-of-the-art Italian black metallers EPHEL DUATH, is scheduled for a release on January 28th. The album is a full 75 minutes in length as it also features two remix tracks, plus the band's 1997 demo *Opera* as an added bonus. EPHEL DUATH is like no other band you are likely to hear in the genre. One listener described them as "the DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN of black metal", and in terms of complexity and sheer precision it's easy to see why. That comment doesn't take in EPHEL DUATH's instinctive

sense of the epic; the grandeur and majesty that sets them miles apart from their so-called peers. The old kings are dead, and the new breed is here to take the throne..." "RAKOTH are presently finalizing the pre-production of their new album, set to be recorded in April for a summer release. The band take elements of folk, black metal and experimentalism and fuse them to unique effect. Their debut album *Planeshift* got 100% in Aardshok and 6 out of 5 in Norway's *Scream Magazine!* Expect only the finest from this quality act." Looks like Dark Symphonies and The End have a new stateside competitor for that experimental extreme stuff, hmm? Good, I say!... AGALLOCH are finishing up their second album *The Mantle*. It's said to be about 75 minutes long, and is planned for release this Spring... The End will be the US distributor for SQUEALER's *Under the Cross*, AT VANCE's *Only Human*, CAYNE's (ex-LACUNA COIL members) *Old Faded Pictures*, HATESPHERE's self titled album, NIGHTSHADE's *Wielding the Scythe*, STORMLORD *At the Gates of Utopia*, as well as the previously announced WOLVERINE's *The Window Purpose*... DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN are on tour in the US between January 24 and March 11, and they definitely have the LotFP stamp of approval so get your ass out there and see what the fuss is about. Ultra technical, ultra tight, ultra heavy... Relapse Records has signed UPHILL BATTLE... I don't know if this has already been mentioned, but it should have been as DAYLIGHT DIES is on the Relapse roster as well... Some Century Media news: "New York's hardcore/metal veterans MERAUDER have finished the recording for their latest album, *Bluetality*. Early listens indicate a SOUNDGARDEN influence mixed in with the band's patented streetsmart metalcore. A release date has not been set, but stay tuned for updates." I didn't even know they were still around. Hell, I didn't know they were still around when they released their last album called, uh, well, whatever it was... Press blurb about the LA date of the MOONSPELL/LACUNA COIL tour: "The final show in Los Angeles was almost cancelled due to an emergency surgery that Fernando (MOONSPELL's vocalist) needed. Needing a tooth pulled, Fernando had the option of getting a normal dose of anesthetic (which would allow for a simple and painless tooth extraction, but that would mean he wouldn't be able to sing at the show) or a small, local dose. Fernando opted for the local dose, which resulted in--as one might imagine--an extraordinary amount of pain, but allowed him to sing." Personally I'd like to have seen him sing all numbed up. Hell, I would have liked to see them sing at ALL but the tour didn't come anywhere near me... Century Media also wants us to know that "SCAR CULTURE had a blast on the Metal Maniacs magazine-sponsored Metal Christmas Ball tour with ENSLAVED, ELECTRIC WIZARD, MACABRE and DIABOLIC." Was it getting along great with all the other bands or the near empty venues that they enjoyed, I wonder?... SHADOW'S FALL will be touring Europe with KITTIE. I still got dibs on the drummer. Of KITTIE... SIGH will have a short tour of the east coast with KHANATE and THE THRONES in April. By east coast they probably mean 'upper east coast'... SKINLAB's album is going to be called *reVolvingRoom* and should see a May release... some Eibon Records news: CANAAN's *Blue Fire* has been reissued... SVARTSINN will release *Devouring Consciousness* and ORDEAL will release *Ma/an* at the end of January... THE FROZEN AUTUMN will be releasing *Emotional Screening Device* in the spring, and WHILE HEAVEN WEPT will be entering the studio in February... Candlelight US will be releasing INIQUITY's *Grime* and SOLAR DAWN's *Equinoctium*, both of which are out on Mighty Music in Europe... from www.ironmaiden.com: "IRON MAIDEN have got together from around the world and re-arranged their personal schedules to help ex-drummer and band mate Clive Burr. The band were to have taken a creative break following the huge worldwide success of their last album and *Brave New World* tour until preparation of their next studio album, due for release in 2003. However, they unanimously decided to break their 12 month sabbatical when they heard news of Clive Burr's ill health while

filming The Classic Album documentary on *The Number Of The Beast*, which was recently released on VHS and DVD. Clive is suffering from multiple sclerosis - a disease of unknown cause. The disorder is causing him intermittent numbness and can affect his balance. Some days are better than others. At present there is no known cure for MS, although he is helping test new drugs in the hope that his body response may contribute to a cure. Clive joined the band at the very end of December 1979 and played on the first three albums, *Iron Maiden*, *Killers* and *Number of the Beast*, and toured extensively with the band over this groundbreaking period before leaving in early 1983. "We were gutted to hear of Clive's condition" said founding IRON MAIDEN member Steve Harris. "It must be a very scary prospect for him to face. It seemed natural that we should try and help Clive by trying to improve his future quality of life. We are setting up a special trust, The Clive Burr MS Trust Fund, and are keen to help him as much as we possibly can." As part of that fund raising attempts the band will be performing two special benefit gigs at London's Brixton Academy on Wednesday 20th and Thursday 21st March 2002. These will be the only shows that the band will play anywhere in the world in 2002 which will be a must for any IRON MAIDEN fans. All profits from the two shows will go to the Clive Burr MS Trust Fund. Most of those involved in the shows, including all band members, their management, agency and promoters, are supplying their services for nothing to maximise the fund. All merchandising profits will also be donated to the fund. Says MAIDEN manager Rod Smallwood of Sanctuary Management, "MAIDEN has always been a family and, even after all these years, we still consider Clive to be part of that family and as such we feel we should help him in any way possible. We are sure the fans will agree and add their support to this." Tickets for this special fund raising event cost £25.00 and will be available to IRON MAIDEN fan club members before going on sale to the public on Friday 25th January.... and some more information on the upcoming US release of ARCH ENEMY's *Wages of Sin*: "The wait is finally over! ARCH ENEMY's frantically anticipated *Wages of Sin* is scheduled for North American release on April 2nd, 2002!... The band has been relentlessly busy since the release of ARCH ENEMY's last album, *Burning Bridges*: They toured the United States together with NEVERMORE; toured Europe with IN FLAMES, CHILDREN OF BODOM and DARK TRANQUILLITY; played the Dynamo Festival in the Netherlands; co-headlined a show in Santiago, Chile with HAMMERFALL; made a one-off appearance in London with CRADLE OF FILTH and have also triumphantly toured Japan for the 3rd time, culminating their Asian efforts with the *Burning Japan* live album, issued only in the land of the rising sun to exclusively thank their Japanese fans... *Wages of Sin* was recorded at Gothenburg's Studio Fredman with producer Fredrik Nordström (DIMMU BORGIR, IN FLAMES) and unlike ARCH ENEMY's previous album efforts, it was mixed by sound wizard Andy Sneap (NEVERMORE, TESTAMENT, KREATOR) at Backstage Studios in England for a brilliantly stunning brutality in sound... Bonus tracks for this version of *Wages of Sin*: Lament Of A Mortal Soul (Exclusive, unreleased bonus track) and Ravenous (Enhanced Video Clip)... plus a bonus CD featuring material with old vocalist Johan Liiva (in NONEXIST and formerly of FURBOWL) with the following: Starbreaker (Previously unreleased JUDAS PRIEST cover), Aces High (IRON MAIDEN cover, previously only available on a Japanese tribute album), Scream Of Anger (EUROPE cover, previously only available as Japanese bonus track), Diva Satanica (Previously only available as Japanese bonus track), Fields of Desolation '99 (Previously only available as Japanese bonus track), Damnations Way (Previously only available as Japanese bonus track), Hydra (Previously only available as Japanese bonus track), and The Immortal (Enhanced Video Clip)". On one hand, it is simply excellent that all of this stuff is getting out in a widely released manner because the album's excellent, and that's no label bullshit or hype, that's a true LotFP

recommendation. Full review on the US release date. Yet on the other hand, anyone that's kept up and bought the Japanese releases in years past (for upwards of \$30 a pop) has now been screwed. Unless having it a year earlier was worth the \$15 difference to you. I just want to hang both ARCH ENEMY and Century Media for putting people in that position though... Late news: Elitist Records has signed Hungary's WITHOUT FACE, who just released that disastrous debut on Dark Symphonies. DS dodged a bullet by not keeping that band, I think... The Grammy nominations this year in the metal category, get ready for this: SLAYER's Disciple from *God Hates Us All*, SLIPKNOT's Left Behind from *Iowa*, SYSTEM OF A DOWN's Chop Suey from *Toxicity*, TOOL's Schism from *Lateralus*, and BLACK SABBATH's The Wizard from *Ozzfest 2001: The Second Millennium*. It's a mainstream award so I don't care, but they're 31 years late on that SABBATH nomination, aren't they? I don't think that new performances of ancient songs should really count...

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New This Week

BOLT THROWER *Honour Valour Pride*
9- 45:37 Metal Blade

BOLT THROWER finally presents their seventh studio album to us (and I've got them all, plus that *Peel Sessions* and *Who Dares Wins* rarities compilation), and it's gotten some decent press (it came out a couple months ago in Europe) so I was excited, as I hadn't been all too keen on what they'd done since 1992's *The IVth Crusade*. In an absolutely unsurprising turn of events, the material is in the exact same vein, with zero progression, as their last few albums. They've pledged it would be so through the years, so at least they are sticking to their guns on that one. For those unfamiliar (which I'd guess is sadly most of you), BOLT THROWER is a mid paced death metal band built firmly on rhythm work and very few riffs, themed completely around war. Earlier albums had more of a science fiction theme (their masterpiece song is generally considered to be World Eater, find it and listen), plus blast beats that added more dynamics. These days the concepts are more realistic and they've stopped going so damned fast. Of note to me mostly is the "new" vocalist (he joined in late 98, early 99?), Dave Ingram. He's pretty damned lucky he's not singing on that last BENEDICTION complete piece of garbage (he was their vocalist for eight years), but he's not lighting the world on fire here. As a replacement for Karl Willets, who'd been with the band for every other release they've had, it's not like a Blaze Bayley level of 'what the fuck were they thinking', but putting the same Willets vocal effects on Ingram and letting him go doesn't sound quite right either. He seems unenthused, with his growly (but not guttural) vocals always delivering every line in the exact same way. Does the song slow down? Speed up? Ingram's an island in the stream, unmoving in his cadence, seemingly willing to die before putting in anything that might resemble variation. It's very odd. Not that the material varies all that much anyway. The entire band is sounding about as excited as Ingram, it is my extreme displeasure to say. BOLT THROWER's always released complete albums rather than albums of individual songs, but it's long past tired. I mean, really, long past tired. These same BOLT THROWER riffs that made songs magical ten full fucking years ago appear on this album, again, and they need a rest. Or some new ideas to make them seem invigorating. These songs plod along without much energy, occasionally hitting the headbanging status, but mostly I just long for albums long ago. The style's the exact same as on my favorite BOLT THROWER album so it's not like I'm asking too much for them to match that sound and quality. I wonder how much my opinion of this would change with an Andy Sneap production or mix, as he's all about the power and that's what this production is missing. Everything's there, and it's heavy, but it's not bowling you over like it needs to. I think it's more the drums that are the problem. No power to the sound, and when the double bass kicks in, theoretically there should be more intensity, right? When you build everything around midpaced riffing and repetition, when your aim is to be heavy, then damn it, an

OK job on the sound is a notch below acceptable. The cover artwork's an absolute mess, while the interior art is pretty good. But this band released their first album well over ten years ago, and for a good while was cutting edge in standout cover art, whether it be Games Workshop art or 160 year old paintings. Here we have just utter garbage, comic book style military battle scenery that's neither exciting nor any good. The center soldier's limbs are all entirely out of proportion, and the whole thing looks very amateurish, which is not exactly fitting to past standards of the band's artwork or the stature they should really have in this scene. It's somehow appropriate to the album, and band itself, and it's a shame that it's come to this. I don't know if new fans can really have a reason to be excited by *Honour Valour Pride*, and I can tell you for certain as a long time fan that I'm not at all excited. It's a losing military campaign here, and seeing as it's been over three years since the last album and around four years again to the one before that, I think the band knows it too. Doubt they'd admit it, and I am sorry that the interview I was supposed to have with these guys got moved to a day that I couldn't do. It absolutely kills me that one of the awesome bands when I got into metal is now completely yesterday's news. Metal needs to appreciate history, but *Realm of Chaos*, *Warmaster*, and *The IVth Crusade* should all still be fairly easy to find. Get those instead.

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FLESHCRAWL *Soulskinmer*
10- 43:33 Metal Blade

Yet more 'time warp' action from the Metal Blade roster as FLESHCRAWL takes quite heavily from the early 90s 'Sunlight sound' that ENTOMBED, DISMEMBER, and GRAVE made famous, and about 1500 bands drove into the ground. And while we're on the edge of a revival of the sound (ENTOMBED just released an album that wasn't shit on by everyone, finally, and DISMEMBER, GRAVE, and UNLEASHED have new albums due out in 2002 that most likely are going to be this same style), FLESHCRAWL is perhaps lucky to have been at the style during the time it wasn't popular. While I have no doubt that someone out there likes FLESHCRAWL, I certainly don't. The problem is the lack of songs, of which ENTOMBED had many (no surprise they had the real success of that entire movement?), UNLEASHED had some, DISMEMBER had a lot on one album (*Massive Killing Capacity*, which was almost universally panned because it pulled back from the brutality and injected melody, but trust me. It's their best album, and a good album). It's just a collection of riffs, tempo changes, and growling thrown together in a big soup and arbitrarily cut up into nine segments called 'songs'. Death metal by nature seems to be nothing much more than an orgy of riffs with a bad attitude, which is why straight up death metal doesn't excite me much anymore, but I don't understand for the life of me why these bands can't arrange their gangbang riffs into something that I could perhaps remember. I've listened to this thing six or seven times and all I'm remembering is that Stranger Aeons is a cool fucking song. Too bad it's not on this album. Not that I'm just pissy with the album, mind you, as there's cool headbanging moments and they don't suck, but there's not one solitary single reason to listen to this album instead of even *An Evil Shade of Grey*. The absolute worst thing about the album, aside from the generic 'oh, skulls, scary!' cover (and I'm not even going to go into the lyrics of songs like Breeding the Dead or Forced to Kill as they just aren't worth the effort), is the cover of JUDAS PRIEST's Metal Gods. Oh god, what were they thinking? With deep growling killing any idea of enunciation (and the high scream on the second go round of the chorus doesn't count), and the damned guitars have no melody. I didn't recognize the song on the first two listens to the album and then when I looked at the booklet I was shocked. This song is not easy to disguise, I would think, but there you go. Sorry folks, but a classic JUDAS PRIEST song with no melody? Why did they bother? It sucks, and they couldn't have disrespected the song more if they'd rapped over it. It's enough to make a faceless, useless background noise album just downright offensive. Just say no. www.fleshcrawl.de

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Already Available
ANOREXIA NERVOSA *New Obscurantis Order*
8- 43:25 Osmose

I bought this solely for the cover art, having not a clue what the band could possibly sound like or anything about their history. Turns out these Frenchmen play a brutal, but creative, form of modern black metal (no surprise as they're on Osmose) that can actually keep my attention. Presenting the album as 'A brand new Bible for the 21st century youth', the band's got its work cut out for it in living up to something that massive. It's very strongly produced blast beat black metal with keyboards and some creative use of vocals. From the imagery (and those godawful band pictures with guys in mesh shirts, bulletbelts, and multicolored hair) it seems they're going for a CRADLE OF FILTH thing, but the music's not at all that romantic black metal and the vocalist doesn't try near as many things, both to his credit and detriment. He doesn't make any annoying noises, but then again he uses just the same standard black metal scream most of the time, breaking it up with passages of clean vocals and then a choir vocal part here and there. Not as varied as I make it sound as the screaming is 90% or more of the vocals. The music itself is of course hyperactive, perhaps too much so for its own good as a good bit of this CD is a blur, with keyboards lurking in the background (and downright buried) most of the time but surfacing for a just-clever-enough bit here and there. Just for the hyperthrottle feel I'd liken this to later EMPEROR, not quite that special as the guitars aren't striking me as having their own identity (what really can at this speed?), but impressive all the same, and having just enough depth of arrangement to not be a MARDUK type blastmaster bore of a band. Conceptually, I really have no clue what the hell is going on, as I think I'm missing the required reading sources (I'm really not all that well read, which should be no surprise since I'd rather scour the net looking for those damned PHLEBOTOMIZED CDs than sit back and read the philosophical works of some 18th or 19th century European author) but with passages like 'Betray me mother/Swallow and kill the one you believe you love' and 'He's the only one that cares about you, masses/I don't care, I don't give a good goddamn/May you all die, you bunch of pigs/Wish I was dead and crucified too', I think it's safe to say what track they're on, and they do turn an eyebrow raising phrase or dozen. I get mixed feelings thinking about the album, because it's good, very professional from sound to layout, but nothing about the album that screams 'excellent' or deserving of upper echelons. Except the cover, of course. But the bottom line is, I don't feel I spent my \$12 badly so I'll go ahead and give the thumbs up to those of you into the more pro forms of black metal. www.mother-anorexia.com

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THE MEADS OF ASPHODEL *The Excommunication of Christ*
13- 48:55 Supernal

A British sort of black metal band that's as loony as, um, a really loony thing and has given us almost fifty minutes in which to prove just how off center they really are. Made up of members of other bands supposedly, and wanting to conceal their identities, Metatron, Jaldabaoth, and Urukbarumel certainly spare no expense in creating a totally commercially unfeasible album. I mean, they wear medieval arms and armor (although are a bit anachronistic, mixing early time periods), have an album name such as they do, and pull out... rock and roll? Middle Eastern melodies? Techno? Time to slow down and really examine what's going on, and determine if it is actually good, and not just wild and interesting. First of all, the production is interesting. Sounds lo-fi in a lot of places, with the guitars not being sharp at all, but quite heavy, and you can still hear all the instruments, the drums and keys are sharp and punchy. But the guitars are thick as hell. Vocally, Metatron has a more natural hoarse vocal, not often using that black metal screech, but here and there uses that CRADLE OF FILTH fake low speaking voice. Things start off with an intro in Latin, performed by AC Wild of BULLDOZER, and after that's

over we go right into Angelwhore. A more standard, rumbly deathy metal number until the twisted keyboard melody pops in front and center, and the whole song follows it, before going back to a fast metal beat with lead guitar over it, ending in an organ bit and it's out. They go through the gyrations of classic metal, thrash, stuff that sounds like Viking metal, all the while keeping it quite underground sounding, if that makes sense, and extreme. Track four (Alex Kurtagic did a much to good job on this layout, as he did for his own BENIGHTED LEAMS stuff, so I can hardly read a damn thing) sounds like it's about to break into Gates of Babylon, but then makes a left turn and becomes something a bit meaner. None other than Huw Lloyd-Langton of HAWKWIND fame contributes lead guitar and solos to two songs, upping the 'what the hell?' quotient even more but being completely effective in his guest role. The songs are taking a surreal quality at this point, with that rock and roll feeling there but not quite right. The band even covers HAWKWIND's Assault and Battery. Right after they do that, they go into this interesting bit called Jezebel and the Philistines performed by HISTORY OF GUNS, which begins with some woman (sounds like it's sampled from a movie, but then again so did AC Wild's intro) saying "It's not about money, it's about a hard cock that belong to a guy fully dressed in rubber..." and just degenerates from there, but the music itself is this floaty electronic soundscape that goes on for four minutes, then we're off on Pale Dread Hunger which is more 'standard' MEADS material. At this point, it's 'Driver, next stop, I want to get off!' but I'm entranced and kind of trapped into seeing how this thing can go from here. Pale Dread Hunger is more of that basic metal riffing with keys over it, until the big bagpipes n' bells breakdown. Not for a second, not a transition, but an extended section where they have the bagpipes (I think that's what they are) and then play the same melody on the bells. Follow that up with the complete techno dance beats of Disembodied Voices of Melchizebub (at least that's what I think it says, this artistic font is quite difficult) that's like the techno remix at the end of BRUTAL TRUTH's *Perpetual Conversion* EP for all I can tell, and then the last proper song, (deep breath) Falling With Lightning Rays Beamed Through the Blazing Firmament Towards the Intended Burial Ground of Gharsag is like a little metal romp through the Olde Faire. There's even a bonus track, Calling All Monsters, and we're done. Quite a ride there, wouldn't you say? I certainly would. On some ways the album's a complete mess, but in other ways metal needs a lot more mess in it, because the constant outpour of ideas and interesting arrangements such as found here make me realize metal won't stand still, and that such a thing was recorded and released is in fact a pretty big triumph. Call it some bastard son of SOLEFALD and BAL SAGOTH if they were covering VENOM songs and you'll be well on your way. I love it. It's still a mess, but I love it! Extensive interview (it went well over an hour) will appear next issue, and it's a good one, I promise. In the meantime, check out their website to play their Shoot the Penis off Jesus game. www.themeadsofaphodel.co.uk

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MENTAL INFECTION *Fear of a Metal Planet*

10- 37:08 Crooked

This is a piece of shit album as bad as I've ever seen as far as presentation. From the third rate packaging (I love the shot of the door opening on the 'metal planet' showing the band inside, that's so pro, let me tell you), to the godawful sound (those guitars are crap, I tell you), the 'vocalist' (very hoarse hardcore growler/shouter), this thing isn't even fit to be a saleable demo in this day and age. But things like that can be corrected next time, how's the band? It's thrash. Thrash metal! Reminds me a bit of the SOD and NUCLEAR ASSAULT stuff I've run across, and not so much 'bay area' stuff but thrash will be thrash and there are some similarities. Some of the riffs do sound well put together, but with that vocalist over everything, it's very difficult to sit through. It even gets worse when they try to be creative, such as the groove bits in the middle of the 'Metal Infection Trilogy.' The lyrics aren't much either, and there's even a song about a plane crash, and the stance they take is like the six

o'clock news. They report what happened and that's it. Strange. If they'd gotten a proper production, and a different singer, I'm sure this could find its audience. But as is, truth be told though, if this is what a metal planet will sound like, then I think I want to get into Britney Spears and Shania Twain. www.mental-infection.com

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RHAPSODY *Rain of a Thousand Flames*

7- 41:55 Limb/SPV

RHAPSODY is probably the most controversial band in metal, this side of CRADLE OF FILTH right now. I don't see why. Let's all step back and take a look at the situation from a fresh perspective, let's do it by looking at their latest release, and let's call it a review, shall we? *Rain of a Thousand Flames* is something between an album and an EP, although it has a full length running time, but they're going to follow it up in just a couple of months with the finale of the Algalord Chronicles. Yeah, that's the most controversial thing about RHAPSODY. Not the music. Not the vocals. The concept and the lyrics. Luca Turilli, lyricist and half of the composing team (along with keyboard player Alex Staropoli) has put together a fantasy sword and sorcery epic which has run for five years now, in the beginning certainly naïve but unquestionably not approaching anything resembling serious literature which by all indications he seems to think he's writing. While the criticism is valid for the first two albums, and Turilli's solo album, these latest two RHAPSODY releases have had a darker vibe lyrically, I guess showing the villains gaining the advantage before what I'm sure will be the giant heroic finale. They've even improved the artwork from the first two albums, first attempting computer graphics for *Dawn of Victory*, and this time around just having a much too sweet painting of the fantasy kind that certainly can't be laughed at. The packaging that RHAPSODY's always had available for their special editions certainly destroys, in a major way, just about any other band's packaging and I defy anyone to show me otherwise. *Rain of a Thousand Flames*' digipak isn't the most exquisite of RHAPSODY's albums, but the thick book with the pop-up (!) of one of the monsters and all. Band and label have worked very hard to make sure when you get one of these CDs, you have something special in your hands. And what of the actual music? Orchestrated symphonic heavy metal with lots of solos, huge melodies, and basically being a more song-oriented Yngwie Malmsteen type of band. Not progressive like SYMPHONY X took it, but more metal I think, and the band's got a knack for creating catchy and memorable songs. And the skill of the musicians can't exactly be questioned. Luca's a guitar hero, no doubt about it, and Staropoli's the closest we're going to get to a synth hero, I guess. They, uh, borrow a bit from classical composers but usually it's credited, as it is here where Antonin Dvorak's New World Symphony is credited as being used as a theme in this CD's The Wizard's Last Rhymes. Standout songs here are one original and one adaptation of GOBLIN's theme of Phenomena. The original, the title track, features the absolutely heaviest stuff the band's done so far. When vocalist Fabio Leone goes for the aggressive stuff, he's just one of the best heavy metal singers out there. And he can carry the melodies just fine. The GOBLIN rework, on the Queen of the Dark Horizons song, is probably their most interesting creation to date, because of what they've done to the original. They chop it up and add RHAPSODY on top. The piano runs, the female opera, it's all taken straight from the original I think, but put the choirs and guitar and drums over it and it becomes an engine that runs quite a big damn train. On the basis of these two songs, I'd say RHAPSODY is excellent and deserving of as high a spot in the metal hierarchy as possible. Throw in the Wizard's Last Rhymes as another good (not great) song, and the interludes, and you cover most of this. But wait. Why is it that people hate RHAPSODY? Even after all this time, RHAPSODY does nothing to hide its weaknesses or admit to mistakes, and instead seems to highlight them in a way that says 'Fuck you!' to the critics. Hollywood Metal is the tag the band gives itself, because in addition to the speed metal, it thinks its orchestral scores are soundtrack quality. And they're telling a story. AND

THEY HAVE THAT FUCKING NARRATOR! Sir Jay 'Light in the Loafers' Lansford is back, and worse than ever. His heavy lisp and lines like 'Hail might warrior!', spoken over 'down' moments to a significant degree on earlier releases has earned the band much scorn. Deserved. And his performance here stops this CD dead in its tracks. I mean, bullet to the brain, drop to the ground, and flatline. The abomination is called Tears of a Dying Angel, and its six and a half minutes aren't so much a song, as a dramatic backdrop for Mr(s?) Lansford. Having a lithp should dithqualify you from any career in front of a microphone to begin with, or tho I'd think any thane perthon would thay. But no, this guy is not only back as narrator moving the story along, but on this piece he ACTS. In a dramatic fashion that makes it sound like the electric shaver's plucking hairs from his butt as he's horrified that the enemy has gotten hold of the emerald sword. Choice lines in this tour de farce include 'The godforthaken bitch ancient thervant of Kron will be free...', 'Come, might warrior... come help your... your... Oh God! Oh god! No! They found it! They found it!', 'the wavth of the oceanth with thoon become gianth attacking our town! And if we don't organithe a valid counteroffenthive to thtop thtothe creaturth, thith will only be a tragic... tragic prelude to an aounthd mathacree!' Yeah, I can see why RHAPTHODY (sorry...) takes a lot of shit. Not that this guy is new, but this is the first time they have him act, and delivery such a long and drawn out and terrible soliloquy. I mean, that track is a total and complete loss, and the guy shows up in other places too, but they shift his voice to a lower pitch and he doesn't embarrass near as bad as he does there. But holy shit, this should be a metal in joke for decades. Second point of absolute befuddlement is the drumming situation. They've got Alex Holzwarth, who was a good enough drummer that he played on those early SIEGES EVEN albums which were WATCHTOWER cloning (!), he's been on tour with these guys, he's pictured in the booklet (with that same 'I hope nobody sees me look), yet if you read the credits, 'Drums played by Thunderforce'? Not that I give a shit one way or the other since 75% of all drums are triggered all to hell so it'll all sound the same anyway, but this band has sold TONS of albums over the past years. Maybe they could have maybe taken the time, that they can afford, to maybe get the input and performance of the goddamn drumming master they claim as a member of the band? You think that might be a decent idea? The other gripe I have is awfully minor after all that (and there's no Aresius the Mighty Wizard in the band photo this time; maybe they actually figured out the best way to stop your own foot from hurting is to stop shooting it), but after all this deluxe packaging, right in the middle of the booklet is a nice bright Limb Music merchandise catalog. Because it is in the middle, it's easily removed, but man oh man, I've long thought that RHAPSODY might be a grand marketing scheme by Limb Schnoor and Luca Turilli and such an atmosphere breaker certainly doesn't make me think I'm just paranoid. How about a website listing that says 'for merchandise...' and leave it at that? I mean, I have a RHAPSODY shirt, I enjoy the band, but come on... So that's RHAPSODY. Amazing epic power metal with many classical influences and incredible playing and great use of hooks and melody. And then there's RHAPSODY, creators of smelly cheese and a band that is stubborn to the point of idiocy in identifying and fixing their weaknesses over the course of four albums now. If you've heard them before, then your opinion won't change because the band hasn't, although I don't think they are stale in the least because the songwriting is cool. If you haven't heard them before, I highly recommend you do, because you deserve to know whether you're on the love em or hate em side of this equation. I promise you, it's worth your time and money to do so. I give this album a mozzarella thumbs up.

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SHAPE OF DESPAIR *Angels of Distress*

5- 54:56 Relapse/Spikefarm

It's meandering doom metal here, and doom that's pretty damned dismal. Slow, slow, slow tempos, with heavy guitars played slow, with plenty of keyboards and

simulated stringed instruments. It sounds positively dismal, which in this case is a great thing because that's exactly what they were trying for. It's certainly epic sounding, with large arcs in the song structures that come back around and make sense so you're not just plodding around for ten minutes and then get dropped. Not much else to say about it, really, it's all atmosphere, not so much specific songs, or actual 'playing' in the conventional sense, but people into things like SKEPTICISM and the like will find this palatable, although this is definitely metal and not just ambient depression. One thing that royally pisses me off is the performance of Pasi Koskinen of AMORPHIS. He does all the growls here. He's excellent in this role! Excellent doing that, excellent with the clean vocals that pop in here and again. It fits! It's great! It makes his AMORPHIS performances sound like shit in comparison! What the hell is he thinking over there? And another thing, I don't know what the Relapse version is like, but the Spikfarm version is this crappy little digipak with no lyrics. I wonder how such bands really keep it together, because there's nothing uplifting here. Nothing. It's probably made even more depressing by the fact that it isn't death-doom in the way that, say, WINTER or DISEMBOWELMENT, or EVOKEN are, but are more atmospheric, more airy and open, yet not anything as heavy metal and 'song'-like that the SABBATH clones or CANDLEMASS come up with. Just some fucking sad melodies over a heavy base. Pretty good, this. www.shapeofdespair.net

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Reader Comments

COMMANDMENTS OF REVIEWING

I would say that for the most part I agree with what you have said in The 10 Commandments of Record Reviewing. However there are a few areas where I would argue different points, and I disagree with a couple of statements that you mentioned in the surrounding content of that particular article, which I will outline below. The main thing that I fully and completely disagreed with was the following statement (made prior to the Commandments themselves): "Even those who have the knowledge will often 'cheat' on their review quality, because anyone receiving the full load of promotional CD's journalists do can't simply deal with them properly. It's impossible." I do not agree at all with this statement. In my particular case, I review literally every item that I receive, an average of 50-100 CD's per month. I spend at least 20-30 minutes writing each review, at the minimum (except for rare cases such as 7"s or CD EP's where there may only be one or two songs to cover), and I feel that I give each item a sufficient degree of coverage that reflects a certain level of honesty and fairness, as well as acting as a service to the readers. Some may disagree, but we all know that no two people think alike. Now, I don't get as much promotional material as every other magazine that's out there, but I would wager that I receive an average or slightly above average amount of material, and I feel that I am obligated to review everything that I am sent out of respect for those who find my work worthy enough that they submit material to my magazine. The only cases in which I will admittedly spend less time on a review, and go into less detail, are those cases in which labels or bands send out promotional items that are not fully packaged. Slipcase promos without complete artwork, lyrics, etc. do not deserve the same amount of time or effort as CD's that come fully packaged with complete information. A demo CD-R with nothing but a shitty tracklist handwritten on the manufacturer's CD-R inlay deserves less attention than a cassette demo that has at least a xeroxed cover with lyrics, some artwork, and so on. And I feel that this is a justified decision. If labels or bands do not feel that their material is worth promoting to the fullest extent, they should not expect writers to go out of their way to analyze these promotional items. It's a two-way street, and the labels often want to take more than they give. Now, on to the Commandments. In the Second Commandment ["If you can't think of five albums you like, five albums you dislike, and ten other bands you're neutral on in the style of the CD, you're not qualified to make a value judgment in it"], I would not

say that such a guideline is always true. For instance, I listen to all forms of music, and can appreciate literally any form of music if it moves me in some way: Be it mainstream hip-hop, or the most underground death/grind. Of course there are certain reviewers out there who are biased towards certain styles of music, and may consistently insult one genre because they hate that style of music. In such cases, I would probably agree with your Commandment and say that this person should not be reviewing CD's from that particular genre. However, if someone is a "music fan", and not restricted to the bounds of simply being just a "metal fan", or a "hardcore fan", or a "punk fan", and so on... then there is no real reason why they should not be able to review any CD from any genre, regardless of whether or not they have an extensive knowledge of that particular genre. Everyone has their points of greater/weaker knowledge, but the bottom line is this: Is it good music? The only other Commandment with which I would take issue is the Tenth Commandment: "Never, ever sum up a review with, 'Listen and decide for yourself.'" In most cases, yes, this would not be the proper way to end or "sum up" a review. However, there have been many cases where I personally have ended a review with similar statements, and I feel that there are circumstances under which such a level of indifference, or at least a lack of concrete judgment, is allowable. For instance, I love early 90's death metal, but I find that most contemporary death metal bands either suffer from piss-poor recording quality, or are just plain boring. But every once in a while a death metal CD will cross my path and I'll think, "Yeah, you know, this isn't that bad. I can get into this. I'm not sure I would run right out and buy it, but I am digging it." Based on such an inclination, I would have to then assume that most people who are diehard death metal fans would certainly enjoy the album, because chances are if someone as nitpicky as myself finds it to be marginally good, then those who are less discerning may indeed find it to be excellent work. In such an instance, ending with a statement like, "Listen and decide for yourself," is completely suitable. The reader doesn't have to purchase the CD in order to "listen and decide", they can simply check out some audio files on the internet, or investigate further to gauge whether or not the purchase would be in their best interests. I think the rest of your Commandments are pretty much right on. Any reviewer who is afraid to give a bad review should not be reviewing CD's. This is especially true when magazines will blatantly write ass-kissing reviews in order to brown-nose labels, be it for advertising money, or because they're afraid they will be cut from a label's promotional mailing list. I will unabashedly state that the vast majority of record labels suck (notably many of the larger "underground" labels), and most of them have a "something for nothing" attitude. I constantly see albums that flat out suck receive glorious praise in many of the more well-known magazines ("underground" or not), and it is painfully clear that the only reason this occurs is usually because these albums are the labels' top priorities, and the magazines are playing into the "business politics" games of music. The label says, "Well hey, we'll do some more advertising in your magazine if you do a cover story on so-and-so..." Well, that's bullshit. It's about music, not money, and not advertising. I have personally been cut from no fewer than 5-10 record labels' promo lists in two years, and I couldn't give a shit. 99% of what these labels release is shit anyway, and if perchance they put out something that I actually want, I'll gladly go shell out the cash myself rather than have to review the other 49 CD's worth of bullshit that they put out each year. Fuck 'em! You know what they say: "If you can't take the heat..." But really, one should always keep in mind that just because you don't like a CD doesn't mean that you can't try to be constructive with your criticisms. There are always going to be cases where something is so mundane and horrific that you can't help but just lash out at it. But nine times out of ten, like it or not, you should explain why, and point out improvements that you think should be made... rather than just trashing it and saying, "This sucks." I also fully agree with your Commandment regarding the fact that "everything matters" (production, artwork, and so on). This is 100% true, and goes back to

what I was saying earlier about slipcase promos and the like, and how they deserve less attention than properly packaged promotional material. And really, don't you find it humorous that the labels that always send out the slipcase promos are also the labels that release the largest quantities of shitty music, and also make the most money (because their highest concern is money)? Maybe if they were more picky about what they released, and stopped sending along huge glossy photos and useless press kits, then they could afford to send out fully packaged CD's. I guess that's all I have to say. I could rant for hours about such topics. On a somewhat related tangent, I have always been of the opinion that labels should "police the press", so to speak. If magazines or individual writers are receiving free material that they either never cover, or never cover in a detailed fashion, then they should no longer receive promotional material. It's as simple as that. Now, this does not mean, "Write positive reviews or we'll cut you from our mailing list." It would basically mean that the writers would have to provide reviews that adhere to basic principles similar to those that your Commandments point out, regardless of whether or not they thought the release was a masterpiece or a piece of shit. If labels were to "trim the fat" in this fashion, there would be fewer shitty magazines out there, and the labels would also save themselves some money and be able to promote their work more efficiently. But anyway... I'll shut up.

Andrew, Aversionline www.aversionline.com

As far as reviewing every single thing that comes across my desk, I definitely don't. Anything applicable that's sent to me as a promo, I do. The weekly format's definitely helped me as far as organization as I can say "This album is released on this date so I will cover it that issue." When I was doing the magazine and waiting six months and one week before deadline I was wondering why I had 100 CD's to write up and then chucked half the reviews for space purposes. So I'll be a lot better now with that sort of thing as the labels start up their new year. As far as listening to all sorts of different genres, that's all good and well, but you should still know something about the genre you're writing about at the moment. Someone reasonably versed in classical, jazz, country, and rock and roll is still going to shit themselves (positive or negative) on their first black metal CD. I know I was just way too positive on power metal when it was a new genre for me. As far as label pressure, I'm fairly free of it these days as I have the space to interview absolutely everybody I like, and I'm not asking for ads so I just don't care, haha. I'm lucky that certain people are actually asking to advertise, which is quite cool, and is the only way you'll see ads on the back page. Thanks for your thorough response though, I found it interesting and I'm sure a chunk of the readership does too.

SCHOLOMANCE

I received the issue with the SCHOLOMANCE interview today. I cannot believe we did a whole page on toys! I forgot most of that. Maybe I shouldn't have said that about the Skeletor raping Teela part? I was a warped child wasn't I? Damn. That should definitely be one of our classic interviews of all time though. And hey, it actually got into some musical depth too! Whoa. I like the review for the most part. What do ya mean by 'studio magic' on the vocals though? You should've been there! There really wasn't anything added to the vocals other than a slight reverb! Jimmy went unholy on us in there. I've heard him produce some demented shit before, but he went somewhere completely unearthly in that session. He's of the John Tardy -my voice IS an instrument- school. I wish to hell we had recorded off just some of the raw vocal tracks for people to hear. There are just two vocal tracks and anything weird you hear is completely natural. There are parts I question myself, but I was there to witness it. We all sat there shaking our heads going "how the fuck is he doing that?"

Scott Crinklaw SCHOLOMANCE

Reading the review again that part I wrote about the vocal effects, just after noting what you wrote in the CD notes about there being none, it makes zero sense, doesn't it?

LotFP Weekly #14 January 22, 2002

Last issue I reviewed the debut album of one of the craziest new bands in quite some time, THE MEADS OF ASPHODEL. It just wasn't quite right. What may have been even less correct is the fact that I wanted to interview the band (unusual for so blatantly anti-religious a band, but they're that damn good), and to do so I had to call a number in England and ask for 'Metatron.' Calling up some unknown foreign number and asking for a name like that, let me tell you. But luckily he answered (I remember when I did the SKYCLAD interview, I called the number Martin gave me and he wasn't home and his mother answered. I felt kind of awkward, but at least I was asking for a normal name, you know?) and things moved along from there. I have to say it, the man's a loon, but he has things to say. Definitely has things to say. We talked for well over an hour, doing one of 'those' kinds of interviews that ended up being just nuts. And it was all Metatron, as I didn't know enough going in to cause trouble. And as always, talking to a Brit caused me great delight because they claim to speak the same language but those phrases that are just so... English, they're great! So here it is, the full conversation, and I do want to mention that while I agree with some of his viewpoints, I don't agree with all of them so direct the hate mail his way, and the fan mail mine.

How are you doing this evening?

Freezing cold. We may look like we love it, but we don't. It's freezing. Horrible!

I'm going to have to apologize for this interview, I like to be a little bit more well prepared, but I actually have no idea about your band beyond the CD, really.

Have you been to the website?

I've looked around there a little bit, and the first thing I really wanted to ask you about is the Shoot Jesus' Penis off game.

That's going to be up there for a month, we just put that up a few days ago. We just like to freak people out. We got none of this heavy, you know, anti this and that, or nazi this and that. We're not about really getting under people's noses. What we're about is the truth, you know? We know for a fact that all this, all this religious shit is just a myth. The only unfortunate thing is when it comes to the Greeks, the Vikings, the Egyptians, the Romans, it's taken in the context of myth, and the rest of it isn't. That's the only difference. But myth it is, make no mistake about it. We just put that thing up just to freak people out.

It's absolutely hilarious!

Yeah! If we believed in him, we wouldn't do it. For people who do believe in him, you could take it as blasphemous, you know? As a human being, as he no doubt was, I'm sure he wouldn't mind.

I think he might mind his dick getting shot off.

<laughs> We've just finished recording three tracks for a split 10" with MAYHEM, and we were wondering what to do. It's very strange talking to an American, because the three tracks have very much to do with, not directly, but with the shit that's been going on, you know? We've done a couple of tracks about how we were right shocked when we sat down and watched them twin towers shit, and we thought this was absolutely crazy! It's all religion again. Make no mistake about it. These crazy Muslims are basically doing what us crazy Europeans were doing about 400 years ago, you know? There's no difference except we've evolved out of it, and they're still in it. The whole concept of the 10", it's called *Jihad*. We're basically trying to put across the point that when innocent people are being fucked in this way, it's just shit. We try to be careful, we put it on this release and not the album because we know not many people will get to hear it, you know? Even if they wanted to, they're not going to press more than a thousand. We thought we'd stick it all there, because it's something we wanted to get out of our systems.

Going back into a little bit of history, how did this band form? How did it get to be as weird as it is?

We just sat down about 98 and the black metal scene in England, it's nonexistent. We've got CRADLE OF

FILTH, who happen to be the biggest black metal band of them all, and you had VENOM in the 80s, that was it for England, but they were the biggest band on Earth as well when it comes to the black metal. Everything in our opinion, it sells, you know? You can sign a good band, but if you sign a bad Norwegian band, it will sell, you know? We thought we'd write three songs. We sent the tapes off to a couple of people. Supernal Music wrote back to us right away and said "Yeah, we want to sign you." Then a couple of months after that we were getting all this coverage in Kerrang and Metal Hammer and we were sitting here thinking this is crazy shit, you know? So we did our second demo along the same lines, and we deliberately said we'd do a couple years and three demos, and we don't care if any offers come up, we're going to do our three demos. At the end of the day, we got approached by some bigger labels but we stuck with the label that was interested when we weren't getting this kind of press, and that's how that came about. We're very MOTORHEAD and HAWKWIND orientated musically, but lyrically is probably as black metal as any band you could possibly mention.

How did you come up with the name of the band? The Lily Fields is a bit weird for this kind of music.

It's a place where shadows roamed, versions of their Earthly selves in Greek myth. We thought that was it! That was the title! You're quite right, lilacs it is! It's a strange coincidence, where I am not, with Godreah zine, is actually 33 Lilac Road which is freaky, you know? We weren't thinking of any heavy names, just names that were there. If you go on the internet with the search engines, it can be a bit of a pain because you end up with everyone that's ever written about that in these books. That's the way it goes.

As far as your style, you were just saying that religion is myth...

We like to call it truth. We're not preaching to no one! As far as we're concerned, we look at everything in a logical way. Really, this black metal thing, VENOM took it in the right context, BATHORY, they toyed with it, but it was pure metal. It was music. Satanism, and whatever you want to call it in someone's personal view, and they're quite entitled to believe whatever they like, but if you take away the Bible, and especially the New Testament in the logical context of what it is, it's rubbish, and then everything else falls down like a row of dominos. Everything! It doesn't exist! To us. The purist form of black metal we think is truth! It's anti-religious establishment! Unfortunately, it's also anti-Satan! One can't exist without the other, you know? It's a logical process. It's just not written at the time, it's second hand, it's hearsay, and it contradicts itself at every turn. It can't be true!

So what has kept people following it for 2000 years now?

When Christianity was born, it was a tiny Roman outpost in Jerusalem, and they'd been warring with each other for years. These chosen people, they think they're the chosen people of God of the whole Earth, why I don't know because they've had a rotten time of it since, right up to the genocide, all the way through it. Even the Bible itself, the New Testament, it's anti-Semitic because it throws the blame on the Jews! It's so pro-Roman, and the reason it's pro-Roman is it grew in Rome! That's where the Christians were born! They had to be pro-Roman to survive. At that time, you could come in from a religion in Egypt and Persia and they were worshipping every fucker! Christianity was such a unique thing. It was a single god, it was preaching shit that was weird and it's a time of oppression. If you're in a third world country now, religion is a very important power. People need something. That's how it grew! Regardless of whether Christ or Jesus existed or not, it's irrelevant now. The Catholic Church has manipulated it through the centuries. They've burned every other book that contradicts what they've made the canon. People discover parchments here and there, but that's what it is! It's all a lie. There's no question about it. In our opinion. <laughs>

Why do you feel so strongly about this that when you make music, this is what you make the lyrics about?

We've been interested in it since time immemorial. We're all over 30 in this band, we've been in other bands, and a couple of us are in bands, which we can't go into. This is the kind of thing we feel the world's been shaped by. Like it or not. The Western culture is the one that has shaped the world, and everything else is just bustling on all around it. That's why these Muslim countries hate America so much. They hate England. They don't like it! They don't like this capitalist state. But if they had it, they'd love it! It wouldn't be perfect, we know it's not perfect, but it's a better thing than they've got now but they don't know it. That's why religion to them is like religion to Europe 500 years ago. You could crook your fingers and a crusade would be launched. And everyone would go, and die! You think no one could do that now! We could not start a war under the name of God. It wouldn't wash. We'd all say fuck off. But these Muslims go "Right!" and they're off! They're wising up over there. Saddam Hussein tried it. They tried to rally the Arab states around them, but these states with sensible governments, they know they'll get wiped out. There's no point in doing something so stupid. That's why I think it's all going to be OK. We get back to them chosen people again, they're causing a lot of shit over there. They really are. Everyone deserves a home to live in. Them, the Palestinians, like it or not. Everyone has a right to freedom. It's a hotbed of shit that's unfortunately is affecting the Western world and we feel very strongly about it. All it takes is one loon to get their hands on some of that heavy chemical shit, or nuke. They'll get it one day. And let the fucker off. Who would have thought someone would fly a Boeing into a tower block a couple months ago? No one would have! But it happens. It affects every one of us. We just happened to put it into music. We don't use the music as a blasting furnace which people perceive black metal to be. Kind Diamond is most black metal than most bands lyric-wise, but he doesn't sound like EMPEROR, you know? We don't think black metal should be determined by the velocity of sound. The music's all over the place. We want to make people go "What the fuck's going on around here?" It's not normal songwriting. Some of our songs are. We try to do it with an attachment there, rather than like SIGH, from Japan, we love that band, but they go one step further than us. There's literally no sense to it.

They stop the songs to go into something else.

Yeah! We try and attach it as best we can, you know?

You said that you were all in other bands that you can't go into, and that's fine. What are you doing here that you can't express through those other bands?

The very structure of the music is totally different for one. The vocals, if you asked anyone, if we started a band now it wouldn't work. But it is working because we can't be bothered how quick it's going to work. We know it's going to take a lot of years to grow. We're not just going to go bang like some bands do and get the notoriety they want. We couldn't employ what we're doing here in our other bands because the music in the other bands is its own. It's something we didn't expect to happen! We can sit and write a song and think 'This isn't going to work' in the other bands, but in the MEADS, anything's possible! Anything! And there's a lot worse to come! <laughs> Believe you me!

Is there any specific reason why you're not using any possible publicity from being in other bands for this one?

Yeah. We don't want anything to taint or to affect the evolution of the band in any way, shape, or form. We don't want to stick our faces in front of cameras, we're not after ego trips, you know? We don't care if we get the piss taken out of. We're always too stoned or off our heads anyway to care. That's the way the band is. We just try to formulate a band whose soul is real and true to itself. It's not stuck in this commercial twist. Maybe we'll get signed to a bigger label this year, maybe not. We do what's good for the band. That's important. If Supernal can push us as far as we need to go, good. If they can't then the band comes first. If there's 10000 people that want to hear it, and a small label can only manage a couple of thousand units, it's not doing the band any good

at all, is it? This is it, but we're not going to let anyone tell us what to do.

Being on Supernal, how many people are going to hear it? Of the bands that are on Supernal, I've never really heard of one getting...

I really have the last say where the band goes. We do discuss it, and a lot of the band was saying "This is going to maybe restrict and strangle the band." I'm saying no it won't. We've got a 10" coming out, we're very underground orientated at the moment. We've got a lot of bands coming out that are having good, better reviews than us on their first album. Which is great, but will they be around in a year or two's time? Bands come and go all the time. Ambition to that point isn't what drives this band along. It's music. If people want to hear it, great. We're not resting all our livelihoods on it. It'll always be there. The new album should be, well, who knows what it's going to be? We've got lots of stuff written for it. It'll be weirder than the first. We'll see how we go.

Your album here is the most song and band oriented thing on Supernal. I've heard everything that's come out on the label, it's probably a miracle I was able to track it all down...

Make no mistake about it, they're a label that likes the obscure, stuff that would be lucky to sell 500 copies, you know? They really are very true to this deep underground thing. They just signed this band called HATE FOREST which are a bit nationalistic, which we're not happy about. We don't want to share a label with that kind of bands, but it's freedom of speech and we do believe in that. But the other bands, they're a very very very tiny market. We shall see. The band will grow, and we'll make sure we have the facilities to grow with it.

The same time I ordered your CD from Supernal I got that M87.

Oh dear.

It was just guitar fuzz for 45 minutes or an hour or whatever.

Unfortunately so! You've been the third person to buy it! <laughs> We wouldn't do that! I presume you knew what you were buying. <laughing>

I had an idea of the concept, I didn't have any idea that's what it was the entire time. It's not like reviews of that are easy to come by.

It's for astronomers only! Background music when they're looking at the stars. It's a bit heavy. Whatever label you're on, you're going to be sharing it with, stuff. There's always something for someone somewhere. Whether that someone's going to be more than one, is another matter. But we've got the 10" coming out, which is good...

You'll definitely get the attention by being on something with MAYHEM.

That's good for the band. The music's a lot more, as I said the three tracks go with the concept of what we're trying to say. The cover art will certainly not be, we could have put the twin towers with the jumbo going in the side of it, that's not going to be it at all. We're not trying to cash in on nothing, but we do want to say something about it. And make a point that we're not on anyone's side as a rule, that we're against all this shit. And shit it is. Bad shit. So the songs are quite slower, and very Middle Eastern, extremely.

You guys are a lot different, just in talking to you, than a lot of black metal bands into anti-religion anyway. Even with the lyrics, you say that's the most typical black metal part, even that's not normal. But with the medieval imagery on the CD, with you guys wearing the helmets and stuff...

It's very English. Extremely English. The armor, we were very conscious about it, it's actually Roman or Celtic armor, which is from like 500BC. Which is typical from the Arthurian age. We don't mention it, but King Arthur, a lot of people think he was an English King! And he was just a raving mad Roman Celtic chieftain kicking Saxons up the butt, and they were Germanic invaders themselves! Suddenly, you mention Saxon, and you think "Englishmen!" Fair enough, because we had Frenchmen in 1066 coming over and kicking our ass as well. We chose that because a lot of the Holy Grail shit evolved

around King Arthur, but even that is all a load of rubbish as well. We're very conscious about it, nobody probably notices it, but we chose armor from a period that we felt explained our meaning of how things can be so exaggerated from an actual event, which King Arthur is, definitely! But people believe it! Some people around the world think he's a king in our history. He's not at all! It just goes to show you what an idea can do.

This isn't really important, but did people really use tridents as weapons of war?

No. No. They were used in the games, and maybe an odd one or two got out onto the battlefield. Well I suppose they did, but they would have been a weapon to lift up to lines of a phalanx, you know? They probably would have been two-pronged so when the men went in with a line of spears, they'd use those to lift the bastards out of the way, and the men at the rear could charge in. We walked up this hill to this keep thing, and when we got there, we had to lay down. We were fucked! The chain mail, when we laid down, the stuff was resting on our chests! I still couldn't breathe! And it made you think, people actually fought in this. That's why they were five foot and 15 stone, you know? They were little weightlifters. We couldn't have fought nobody! But no, you couldn't have pierced much with three prongs going in at the same time. You could certainly go through anything with one, that would just stop you.

Another question about the armor, just because it's rare that you see someone bothering with the real thing instead of just having a sword in the woods, but the shot of you guys taking a leak against the wall is pretty humorous there.

Again, we don't want people to think, well you look at a serious black metal band, at the end of the day, I don't care what black metal band you could pluck out of anyone, at the end of the day they go home and they laugh. They pick up a beer and drink and they laugh. They watch a film and they laugh. They go to a gig, and they're happy. They're not miserable bastards. I don't care if it's Count Grishnackh or whatever you want to do, a lot of the time, they actually do smile. We're trying to get that across. However serious we are, we are still people. We're not miserable bastards who worship Satan and fuck goats up the ass. We don't go around kicking people's heads in with nazi swastikas tattooed on our bollocks, you know? This is real. To us, it's real. We're three people trying to create something. We want to lighten it up as well. We don't want people to think we're three warriors and if you bump into us, we're going to give you a right around crack to the head. We don't want that! When you open that up, well I don't know what people think of it, this is what we're trying to do. We're trying to let people know there's a humorous side to everything.

I like the shot because it gives a clear shot of the Roman style armor there.

Yeah! A lot of bands wouldn't even dream of doing it, because it would detract... from DIMMU BORGIR to CRADLE OF FILTH, there's not a lot of humor in it. There really isn't. It's like the T-shirt. We're going to be releasing a T-shirt soon that's really bad. Bad. We're doing because, if you're going to do it, then do it. 'Jesus is a Cunt.' Great. Round of applause. But this T-shirt, if you wear it, you're going to be a lunatic. We'll only print one, because if anybody buys it they're going to be insane! We wouldn't wear it! No way! It's cool like anal Mary, but it's directed at the Magdelene, who was a prostitute. But people can take it the other way if they want, all they have to do is ask us. We're not out to blaspheme the mother of Christ, we don't want to upset too many people with that kind of press seeking stuff, if you want to call it that. But it's not that. It's a snap, an actual picture, really really absolutely disgraceful, probably something she did because anal sex in them days was nothing. It's not like DIMMU BORGIR's Cunt Hunters of the Night, that backfired on them badly. If you're going to do it, do it. So we are.

You said Cunt Hunters of the Night backfired on them?

It just wasn't... AKERCOCKE [ack-er-cock-ee if you're wondering], good band, but their T-shirt range... there's

ways of doing things right, CRADLE OF FILTH, did things right. If you're going to do things, do them right, and unfortunately, CRADLE OF FILTH done things right. To make money. We're not money orientated, yet, I'm not saying we won't be, but at the moment, we're not. We could print a great range of T-shirts, but we're not that bothered. We'll do one that will piss over the lot of them.

Going back to the music of the band, you've got a lot of what I call Middle Eastern melodies. How do you get those influences? Black metal bands sometimes have ethnic influences but you guys are using ethnic influences that aren't even your heritage.

A lot of medieval music is an evolution of Middle Eastern music, believe it or not. We steered clear of using a lot of medieval English instruments like bagpipes, blah blah blah, and we focused on the place that is the birth of what we perceive to be this great lie. The Middle East, that's where it's at. Everything comes from the Middle East. Whether it's Iraq, the cradle of civilization where we wandered out of Africa black and ended up brown and then became white. Unless you lived in Japan, instead it snowed for 10000 years and you've got funny eyes, you know? All this, from Allah to Jehovah, everything happened there. In that little wandering hotbed of nomads and smelly goats. Really! It's crazy, absolutely insane. We wanted to use that music, I think our music is very English, especially the guitar sound and compositions, but we want to introduce that feeling, that atmosphere, that our lyrics are about, all gel. The armor again has a lot to do with it. It's that time period when all this was born. The time period all this was sewn in the minds of men. And considering only the people that were creating this shit, which was in Rome, could read, they could do whatever they fucking wanted! And they did! And now it's too late to change because even if you told someone it was a lie and proved it, no one would care. But we just want to tell the truth. We've got a hundred page thing going up on the website in the middle of the year that we've been working on for months and months and months.

One hundred pages?

Yeah! It basically elaborates on what I spoke to you about, this shit, it's everything you want to know about the gospels, everything you want to know about the Bible. Everything. You name anything, we just go on and on and on using facts and archeological evidence and we just sit there and say "This is how it was." People can read it if they want or they can not. It's very important to us.

I have a couple of questions about guest stars on the album. What is HISTORY OF GUNS?

An absolutely crazy gothic electro band that we quite like. Very unknown, very hard, very weird. That's what they are.

It seems weird that you talk about everything coming from that one time period, and then you've got electronic stuff on the CD.

Well that was deliberate. I wanted something roundabout the middle of the album. It doesn't fit, for one. People will say "Christ!" If it makes them skip it every time they play the album, then it's done its job. It really has. That was the whole idea of putting it in there, to spin people's heads around. We selected the tracklist of the album, and at the end it just falls apart on you. It really does. We think we've done it well. The last couple of tracks are mad! We don't care if people sit there and say "God, this is shit!" They're saying something, and we hope there are a lot of the songs they're going to like. That's what we want. We got AC Wild from BULLDOZER to do the narration, which was great. And Huw Lloyd-Langton from HAWKWIND to do guitars on a couple of tracks. Them tracks were designed to have lead on, and we said "Look, we might as well get someone that can play the fucker well." And he can. We'll try and do Overkill with Fast Eddie Clarke, that's the plan. Mirai from SIGH has agreed to work on a track with us, which is good. We've got a few other people in mind that aren't confirmed to do shit. We even tried to get Ray Manzarek from the DOORS to do something. We've not gotten past the record label Elektra.

How do you get someone from HAWKWIND to do something for an extreme metal band?

That was very very difficult indeed. But we've all been into that band for so long, we knew contacts and we started with one, and we ended up getting to him through his website in the end. And he agreed to do it. He's an absolute excellent bloke. And he'll definitely be on the next album. Without question of a doubt. We just love his guitar. It's very unblack metal. That's what we want. We got a piano player who can play like Jools Holland. We've got a female vocalist, we weren't going to use one, but we've got one, you know that PINK FLOYD track where she really goes? We've got a female vocalist in mind that's too much, and we're going to use her on one track. When you'll hear it, you'll see the thing shit, this is someone who knows how to sing. We wanted to coordinate people at the peak of their profession to do it, like flute work maybe, and we'll just do our music. That's what this band's about, we try to make each song unique. We hadn't have the budget to do it on the first album, in any shape or form. If we had the budget, which we're working towards, but you can't do that without building up a fanbase, it's very very difficult. Bands just push their faces everywhere and end up talking shit, which I probably do myself! We're really trying to build up a loyal followup. And one day we'll play live. But we just don't want to get out, wire up our amps, and try a smelly pub. We love going to them and watching the bands do it, but we want to do it when we're ready when we can really blow people away. VENOM's stage show is nothing compared to what we've got in mind. We can't say we're ever going to do it because it takes money.

I notice this album was recorded way back in April of 2000. It took a long time to get out. What happened there?

That's the trouble with being on a small label. That's the answer. We weren't very happy about it. We won't let it happen again.

I've been doing this a few years, and I'm still horribly ignorant about the music industry. I don't understand how you can sign a band but then not have the resources to get them out there once they're signed.

Once you have a band under contract, a lot of these contracts stipulate that after the receipt of the master tapes, the album has got to be released within six months. When you find out the label has their year before the get the master tapes, then have their six months to release it, there's lots of ways that labels can shackle bands. It's up to the band to get off the contract, but at the same time, if the band says "Fuck you, we'll do it ourselves," they'll have to self release it because another label won't touch them when they're under contract. But if they do it themselves, it's up to the label to stop them. It's very unlikely the label will spend a couple of grand to take them to court. So that option's always there, but it won't come to that. Alex [Kurtagic] from Supternal, he's a nice bloke. Bands are very frightened of law, but we're not, and we won't let it happen again. Let's put it that way. It will not happen again. The band's too important now.

How far do you think you can take this band as far as being in the metal public eye?

If we can capture what BATHORY did as a non touring band, and what VENOM managed to do til their third album, they never toured til their third, then we can go far. It's very hard without touring relentlessly to build a big fanbase. It's all down to the magazines. It really is. And how they feel at the time. If they haven't had sex for the past month, they're going to give everyone a shit review. You know?

Oh yes.

Our label hasn't got the punch to say "Look, we're going to send you a CD to review, and we're also going to give you a hundred quid for a month's advertising." Or whatever, the big labels will give a grand for a month's advertising. That CD is going to get a blinding review! I know people who do it, and that's what happens. Shit gets great reviews, and you'll always find a full page ad in the same issue. Make no mistake. If this band's going to become anything, it's going to become something through the music and nothing else. We haven't got nothing else

but the music. That's it. If it happens, it happens, if it doesn't it won't be through lack of trying.

I think you just explained my failure in the magazine business.

Why?

All my favorite bands, their labels never advertised and I still said they are the best things in the world so the people that do advertise...

Again, the labels are very particular with who they advertise with. It's very very very very hard. Only dedication and love of music will make you do this in two or three years' time. Believe me, I know. I've been doing all sorts of shit from labels to zines to bands for years and years and years. I know, it is shit. You've got to love it to want to do it. And at times you think "What's the fucking point?" Everyone's in it for the cash, at the end of the day. It's a real shame. The bands aren't. That's the only part of the music industry that comes from the heart. Everything else is money orientated. But without it, you haven't got the music, you know? You've got to have the labels, you've got to have the promoters, you've got to have the CD pressing plants. You've got to have the studios. And you've got to pay them! And it's all down to your £1.25. You've done all that work to pay them. You've got your CD in the shop for 14 quid. Your band will make their pound, the label will make their fiver, the distributors will make their three quid, and the shops will make their fiver. That's how it works, and it's all down to the one thing that makes it work in the first place. The music. The bands get a real shit deal, man. And it's bollocks. It's rubbish. But you can't change it, so you go with it or let it go past you. It's sad. It really is sad. Being a label is great. You can release 500 CDs of a band, it costs you a grand, you can make yourself ten, then pay the band 500 quid. You've made thousands of pounds just by releasing 500 CDs. I just don't understand it! It's ridiculous! That's how labels survive. By releasing shit! And people will buy it!

What kills me is that people buy it, then like it when they buy it.

I've got CDs coming out of my ears, and sometimes I think this is shit! It is! Awful stuff!

And then when they make the format change to DVD audio...

Buy it again! That's it! It's the way it is, man. But at the end of the day with us, is about being honest with yourself as well. We hope people realize that's what we want to do. We don't want to rip nobody off. It's very hard when labels do it. There's nothing you can do about that. We'd love to sell CDs for like six quid, get our pound, give the label two pounds, you know? Instead of giving everyone else this shit. It's bollocks! It really is toss! Everyone is making money! Except the bands! They don't need to settle for that much, but if they weren't greedy bastards, they wouldn't do it if there wasn't money to be made. It's a complete toss! And that's another thing, once that band has sold its 500 CDs, their 500 go to the label anyway because they probably have given the band 500 to record the fucker! So we're not expecting to make anything. Really!

Well now I'm depressed.

<laughs> Well I'm not. We knew about this when we started, so we know. Everyone's been ripped off, and so are we. We're all being ripped off together.

One big happy ripped off family.

That's what we are! But I hope you get as much pleasure out of listening to it as we had making it. That's the thing. You can't really buy that.

Moving on to something we touched on a little earlier, it seems that English bands, or the good English bands anyway, will always have their own sound that is unique to the band, where unique bands from other countries just sound weird, without cohesion or something. I don't know how to explain it, like SIGH is a perfect example, or the Austrian bands like DORNENREICH.

Oh my god. Crazy Austrian bands like ABIGOR. Oh dear.

English bands, when you're weird, I'm thinking you guys, I'm thinking BAL SAGOTH, I'm thinking

EBONYLAKE, it's crazy shit that keeps it together and doesn't sound like a mixmaster.

If you look at MY DYING BRIDE or CATHEDRAL, a lot of English bands have a unique sound. If you delve deeper, you do find a lot of bands that do sound like everyone else.

Right. That's why I said the good bands.

<laughs> It is strange, but England is a very very very, I don't know, cosmopolitan might be a good word. There are so many different parts. In England you have so many counties on a smaller scale. People from up north and from the south and east and Wales and Scotland. To us, in London, they're all foreigners! And they all come out with their own style shit. It is crazy. I don't suppose Norway or Sweden are like that. They're all just Norwegians, and they live in different parts of ice cubes. Is America the same? Do you find they're a bit stranger the bigger the distance between the states?

Yeah! I'm from the north living in the south, and there's still a surprising amount of people still upset they lost our civil war.

That's what I'm saying! It's like that in England. We've had civil wars here as well, and we have things like Lancashire and Yorkshire, and they're very prejudiced towards each other. The Scots hate the Welsh, the English hate everybody, you know? It's mad! There's a lot of influences, they bounce all over the place. The Catholics... Religion! Religion over here in this tiny, smoke filled, frosty, ghastly place, is everywhere! Every religion you can think of is here, and it's all mixed up with each other. Every one. Anything you mention is here. It's a crazy place, England. It really is. And the music, there's so much scope. Wherever they are, they're going to come up with something different. BAL SAGOTH, as you say, are incredibly unique. No one sounds like them. No one could if they tried! I love them. If you see Germany or whatever, they seem to be more in tune with what the country is doing. You've got Swedish death metal, but it all sounds the fucking same! It's good, but very little scope for it. English death metal doesn't really exist, I guess NAPALM DEATH and CARCASS are the only bands that we've ever had that have really hit the death metal notes. Black metal, again, CRADLE OF FILTH, nobody sounds like that band.

But they try.

A lot of bands try, I totally agree. REIGN OF EREBUS, they were CRADLE OF FILTH sounding, but have you heard the new album? It's awesome, it really is. I'm telling you it's awesome. ANAAL NATHRACK, they're from Mordgrimm, they've released the most intensely violent album you're ever likely to hear. They're very good.

I myself like the more melodic things like OPETH.

OPETH, brilliant band! IN THE WOODS!

Oh yeah.

Incredible band. We like a lot of that shit too. Each member of the band has his own way. It's diverse, it really is. We don't just like one thing. Most black metal bands would say BURZUM! Yes, BURZUM! And that's it! They're saying that for a reason. Again, true black metal, the old anagram if you'd like to call it, nobody knows what the fuck it means. One or two crazy years in Norway, insignificant, and only the media made it! How many people get stabbed on their doorstep? How many neo-nazi's go around doing that? Fucking hundreds of them! Because one of them was in a band that the media caught on, it just started this whole black metal shit. I love it, I really do, there's good music in it, but to us, the lyrics, I don't know where they come from sometimes...

You have to wonder if Kerrang didn't catch onto that black metal thing if they would have needed to stab each other anyway.

Who would have cared about Eurononymous and his shop he was in for a year anyway selling nothing? He would have still been selling nothing. Because the music, in my opinion, the music was not good enough to warrant the push it got. EMPEROR, a different kettle of fish. Class. Make no mistake. You hear EMPEROR's demo, you'll throw up. Fucking awful. Awful!

I agree.

But they have proven to be an absolutely blinding band. BURZUM, to me, have never been any good. I know people love 'em because of the extremity of it, it certainly captures what it was all about. MAYHEM, when they did get their album out, when everyone was dead, *De Mysteriis* is an absolutely incredible album. It is very good! But the sparks that caused all this, DARK THRONE were a death metal band anyway, so were EMPEROR! They decided "This is the way! Let's paint our faces and leap about and burn down a few of them!" We wouldn't burn down a church that is a work of art. We're not into that shit. Those Norwegian churches, they were gorgeous. Not because we love God but they've been part of someone's culture, like it or not. That's what kids do, maybe if we were kids we would have done the same, but we're older and wiser now man.

The guy from M87 just needs to burn down a church and he'll sell fifty thousand copies.

If he did, he would! He would! That's what it takes, you know? DEICIDE, would there have been DEICIDE if Glen Benton hadn't been the crazy man that he is? All the press he's got, all these outrageous things he's said that's probably caused his family to die of grief, does he think he's worth it? He's not. The MEADS are very conscious of this. We could do things. Of course we could! But do we want to spend a couple of years in prison, let's go burn the fucker down! We could do it, we'd get the press, but we don't want to spend two years in prison! We don't want to get fucked up the ass! We don't want none of that shit! But we could do it! Make no mistake! Easily! Anyone can kill anyone, anyone can burn a church. It's not hard, really. Is it? It's not! Seriously! It's the easiest thing in the world to do, any one of us could do it. It doesn't take courage, it just takes something not quite right in the brain.

As far as the tons of anti-Christian bands out there, besides yourselves, who do you think has the best lyrics that express that?

None. No. I can't think of one. They're all rooted in something called Satanism. Satanism doesn't exist to us, because if it did, Christ would. A lot of people try to take Satanism away from Christianity by saying it's tapping into the dark forces of human nature. You can't deny the dark forces of human nature exist but that's just an excuse. They realize it's bollocks. Crowley and all that, we respect people's right to do whatever they want, but people have to respect our right to say what we want about it. Crowley and LaVey, they were just doing their thing. Crowley enjoyed giving birds one over. He was a pervert! Which is fine. But we don't see anyone's lyrics... well nobody's going to our lyrics because the label's made sure they printed everything in the most illegible text which we did tell him not to do that! But there you go. I'm sure we'll have them all up on the website. If people want to read them, we can. We've not gone overboard and said "Hey, read this, this is the way it is." You'll probably notice when you bought the album, you didn't feel like you were getting a message at all. That's fine! But we have got one. And it's the truth! All we're trying to do is the truth. A lot of bands, they sing about their ancient myths, a lot of these Norwegian bands do, a lot of countries do that. Myths are what hold the world. They were real to people at one time. I can't think of any band's lyrics that don't go beyond and literally talk about rubbish which they don't understand. We've spent a lot of years, many many many many more than you can imagine, we know what we're talking about. We've spent our lives dissecting a book that no one really reads! Anyone can pick up the Bible and write a black metal song by reading the Revelations. They don't realize that whole book is about Rome, it's about Nero! That's what it is. Nothing else!

The last proper song you have has the verse that starts 'Call me Satan, worship Satan for eternity'. That leaves an impression there...

But if you listen to it very carefully, it's taking the piss! That's all it's doing. It's taking the piss. People do do that. Like the Moonies or any other cult, you can get indoctrinated into anything! Very few things in life are based on truth. It's human nature. If you're with your bird and you're caught out, you've got to lie to save your skin!

We're all liars. But the MEADS are a creation that don't have to lie. The Watchers of Catal Huyuk, that is a very ancient thing. Angel in the Bible, there isn't one mention of wings. Every angel is a messenger, but nobody mentions wings. It's a medieval vision. Someone decided to stick wings on them! The angels of the Bible do not have wings! Everyone things of an angel, wings, yes yes yes. Flying god knows whatever. The basis for that is rubbish. It drives us mad! Because we know at the end of the day, we're such a minority, and it's a shame but the truth is staring you in the face. That's what all these songs are all about.

Unfortunately I've got to be looking at my phone bill here, I'll just wind up with a couple more questions. What new albums have you really been getting into?

I shouldn't really say it but I've got the new MOTORHEAD DVD. And the new HAWKWIND album at the Astoria last year, we love them. What else have I got? Oh dear oh dear. The new EMPEROR, that's very good. The new REIGN OF EREBUS, I'll mention that band again. That's an absolutely stunning English band that won't get near where they deserve because of the way they are. They've slagged off a few reviewers in their time and they're banned from a few high profile mags I won't mention. Which is a shame because those reviewers deserved it. That's about it. When it comes to getting songs together, which we've been doing on these three tracks on the split, we deliberately try to steer away from hearing any black metal. We don't want to be influenced by it. We really don't. One Meads song can be the product of five songs! And I'll just say put that, and that there. It ends up sounding OK. Somebody else like Jaldabaoth feels "We can't do that!" Why can't we? Who fucking cares? We really don't. If you like our music, that's really great because we really believe in what we do. If not, go listen to someone else!

What's your favorite other band on Supernal?

Oh dear. I haven't got one.

Really?

No no no. No no no no no no. I really want to say one. I can't think.

If you don't have any and you want to get one, get the last FLEURETY.

Now I've got that! I have to be on acid to hear it.

Have you heard their first album?

Yes! Yes! Now that is a different kettle of fish. Less mad than the last one.

KING CRIMSON meets black metal.

Was on Misanthropy, was it?

Yeah, and Aesthetic Death, it was a split release for the two labels.

That's it! I used to like that label. I got that VED BUENS ENDE tape and album of them, I think they're great. Do you remember them?

I've got For Those Who Caress the Pale and Written in Waters.

Yeah man! Good shit! I think that's really really good stuff. But we really try not to sound like anybody else. We don't want to sound like anybody else! From the first demo, the second, or the third, on the third we really found our sound.

To wrap things up, do you have any final words for the readers?

Shit. Final words to the readers? Just be lucky in what you buy. Whatever you buy on the strength of a review is going to be shit or good. I just hope you find a reviewer that's honest! Most of them aren't! Believe me! I won't say shit like "Buy this." If you're interested enough, just look at the website. But we've done something that's different, a very dangerous thing to do! We'd have gotten further if we conformed to what people think they should be hearing. Everyone's indoctrinated along the line unless you're in the real underground where you choose your shit. One thing's for sure, if we get on a bigger label, we'll always still release those split 7"s. We're always stick an unknown English band on there. CRADLE OF FILTH won't do it, none of them fuckers do it. Once they're there, they're there. But we'll always do it. We'll always have one foot in this smelly place that we love so much. The underground is where we're at and only time will tell if we're true to our words. Hopefully we'll get

that far and prove that is what we will always do. Non money making things will always be part of this band.

Discography

The Excommunication of Christ (2001 Supernal)

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If I told you this next interview was with a German power metal band's singer, what springs to mind? Not much good, I'd think. Or at the very least, not much original. Well, luckily, even in Germany, there's some originality. BRAINSTORM just released a couple months ago one of the better 'heavy metal' albums to come through the scene in awhile, and better yet, their singer has loads of personality and ability. Andy B. Franck is a veteran of the German metal wars, and Metus Mortis is his seventh album he's sang on since 1994 with various bands. I regret we didn't get more time to talk (he was on one of those Metal Blade 30 minute slots for everyone and that's it schedules for interviews) but we made the most of the time we did have, I think you'd agree...):

The most important thing is you have an absolutely killer new album out. I guess it's been out a couple months in Europe, I'm wondering what the response has been?

One month. It's been unbelievable! The first shock we had was that we were number one in the most important German metal magazine Rock Hard of all the releases that month. We said OK, that's pretty good, that will happen once in our lives! About seven or eight days later the second shock came, we were number one record of the month in the second most important magazine in Europe, the Heavy Oder Was? magazine. Since then, it's really fucking unbelievable! We receive emails and letters from fans all around the world. For two and a half, three months I've been making interviews. And it looks like it never ends! Yesterday, Andreas from Metal Blade Germany gave me the schedule for interviews while we're on tour in January. It really looks like it doesn't stop anymore. I asked him one week ago, "I've made interviews for more than two months, I think I've spoke to every single magazine in Europe, am I right?" He goes "No no no, there are also many more out there but they will also talk to you when you're on tour!" Well thank you very much! That's a good though. I'm not angry about that because it's a good sign and what I always wanted. Since I was 14 or 15 years old, I always read the magazines, I always read interviews with every other band, and I myself am in the magazines, and that makes me really fucking proud. It shows there are fans and kids out there who want to know anything about the band. That's a good sign, absolutely!

I personally think it's a big improvement over Ambiguity.

We still love *Ambiguity*, of course we do, but I think the main difference between *Ambiguity* and *Metus Mortis* is that when I joined BRAINSTORM in October 1999, the songs were totally written. So I joined BRAINSTORM, I wrote the lyrics, I wrote the vocal lines, and it January 2000, just two or three months later, we were going into the studio to record *Ambiguity*, so there was not much time left to change anything in the songs. So now with *Metus Mortis*, I was totally involved in the writing process from the first day on. Of course this is something that is completely different. It is always important for a singer to be part of the music, to know what the music is all about, so you can give the lyrics and the verse much more expression. This really helped me a lot. I think you can also here that's an album written by five members of the band. Again, I also did the lyrics and the vocal lines by myself. I always do that. That's my ego! It's really an album arranged and written by the whole band, and every single note is just how we wanted it. Perfect. That's why we love so much this *Metus Mortis* album.

When you did join up, how was it coming into a band that had a history that went back ten years?

I never cared about that. Really! We were on tour and I was in the bus reading a paper, and I saw that BRAINSTORM exists for more than ten years, so I asked Torsten [Ihlenfeld] "Hey, you've been around ten years?" He says yeah. I never knew that! <laughs> It took more than half a year, but then I had a birthday and these guys showed up at my house and they gave me their first demo tapes and said "Now you're a member from your first day on. You have to know every single song we've ever done!" I listened to the stuff and I said "OK, now I know every single song, but please, I never want to sing one of those songs from your first demo tape." They're really not good. If you want to make a revival night and play the old songs, call up the old singers and do it with them! I will sing the new stuff. But I still love the first two albums. I discovered BRAINSTORM when they had their first album *Hungry*. That's the first time I heard about BRAINSTORM. Since then, I've thought they were a great band but I never cared about the past. For me, it was more important to know how the members of the band are, are they cool, were they down to Earth? Do we have the same background, do we all want the same? Do we want to play the same music? After we found out about all those things, that helped me a lot. I never cared about anything else.

You had an advantage coming into the band. The first two albums were on a smaller label, I've not heard them.

I can tell you a secret! We have all the rights on the first two albums, and we're thinking about re-releasing them at the end of [2002], maybe in two years, with a lot of bonus material. Those old demo songs, you know? <laughs> Maybe some live material with those old songs sung by me from the festivals. Really something special for the fans, every version would be a double CD. Value for money.

My point with that is, you didn't have the 'new singer' thing going on, because with *Ambiguity* being on Metal Blade...

The band asked me, "Do you want to sing songs from the first two albums?" I said no no no! Marcus [Jurgens], he did a great job on that and he is of course still proud of what he has done then at that time. I won't change anything there. These are original recordings, and we should let them be as they are. These are songs written by BRAINSTORM and sung by Marcus Jurgens at that time. **One thing that really drew me to the new CD is that it sounds very different than everything else that's coming out that's labeled 'heavy metal' or 'power metal.'**

Thank you very much, that sounds good! Now we can go on talking! <laughs> I think the main reason of course, we did grow up with bands like HELLOWEEN, but we never cared about them so much. Musically, HELLOWEEN and those bands have never been important to me in writing songs. I grew up with bands like TESTAMENT, VIOLENCE, EXODUS, FORBIDDEN, old MEGADETH, old METALLICA. All those old bay area thrash metal bands, or the power metal bands like VICIOUS RUMOURS or METAL CHURCH. For all of us in the band, those bands have been very important. These days, what really pisses me off is eight out of ten records coming out each month are HELLOWEEN clones, or STRATOVARIUS clones or RUNNING WILD clones. It's a shame, because there are a lot of talented musicians out there but they all play the same thing. All those singers, they sing about dragons and swords and knights and I can't stand these fucking pictures anymore with guy standing there with a fucking big sword in their hand. Sorry! I really have a problem with that right now. It's cool if you do that once. If one or two bands are doing that, no problem. But there are tons of bands out there, I want to know where they all get their swords from! <laughs> Maybe I can ask my wife if she can give me a knife from the kitchen and I can stand there in the picture with this knife with a sign on it "This is from my wife, she gave me that from our kitchen." You will never see me posing in a picture with a sword in my hand. No. Never. Did you the pictures of HAMMEFALL

for the new album? Five members, and five swords! The most unbelievable thing is at the same time, ten or twenty other bands released pictures, again, five members, five swords. I really thought "Holy shit, what man makes so much money in making swords nowadays?" Somewhere in Germany or Sweden, there must be a little factory making swords only for those stupid metal acts. "Hey man, there's a new metal band coming out, maybe we can sell some swords!"

Send them a catalog.

I think HAMMERFALL is OK, they do a good job. I had a long discussion with Oscar [Dronjak] and Joacim [Cans], and I know they do not look at themselves too seriously. They have fun, and they know it's just HELLOWEEN, it's just RUNNING WILD. There are so many other bands that see themselves as very very serious and this I can only laugh about. It's music, it's metal, you should have fun, you should have fun on stage, you should not take two hours dressing up in some knight's trousers or whatever.

You're definitely not going for the swords and sorcery thing, but what is the main inspiration for your lyrics?

I like writing lyrics about things that really happen in life. I like reading about psychological or religious things. Since September 11, it's so sad that so many things you've written about in your lyrics, they came true! This is really unbelievable. What else can you say? It's much easier to write about something you're really interested in, and I'm really interested in these things like religious stuff. Not only nowadays, but things we've had in the past. There's always been wars because of religion. It's not easy sometimes to discover something new, but before we write songs for the next Brainstorm album, I should buy myself some books and start reading much more! I don't know, we'll see.

For the song Behind, were you realizing you were sounding like Dave Mustaine in some of those lines?

Oh yes. Dave is my schizophrenic brother, and he came out in that moment! I became red haired, yeah! They looked at me and said "Andy's getting red hair!" <does exaggerated Mustaine voice> "What do you mean I don't believe in God?" <laughs> The funny thing is, I had the lyric and I had the vocal lines ready for the whole song. We always practiced that, and I did the lyrics in a totally different way. I came into the studio, and all of the guitars, drums, and bass were already recorded. I put on the headphones, Achim [Kohler], the producer, said "Now we're talking about Behind, let's go for it." I heard the song for the first time well produced, and I thought I should really do something different. I tried my very best, Andreas [Mailander], the bassist of BRAINSTORM, was in the production office, came out and said "What the hell was that, that Dave Mustaine?" I asked if it was really that bad. He said "No, it sounds cool, that's the main problem!" If it sounds cool, maybe I sound more like Dave Mustaine that he does nowadays, because I think the new MEGADETH doesn't sound like MEGADETH at all. The last one was very horrible. But I've been a big MEGADETH fan until *Cryptic Writings*. I've been on tour with them. But when I met Dave Ellefson, I also let him know at the Bang Your Festival, I told him, "Dave, Risk was bullshit." He says "You're really honest, huh?" I said "Why shouldn't I be? You live in the States, I live in Germany, so you can't kill me." *The World Needs Needs a Hero*. OK, but this hero is not Dave Mustaine anymore. I don't know what the world needs. It's much much better than the last album. They're on the right way.

Actually having up front guitars. Always a good recovering step for a metal band.

I know another band who can do that! You know who I'm talking about?

Hmm, METALLICA?

Hey, surprise!

I notice you guys don't use as much keyboards as a lot of bands but then you've got the Hollow Hideaway song that just because with the keyboard introduction into the song.

That was just an idea we had when we were in the studio. We have no real keyboarder in the band. We just have Miro, who is producing RHAPSODY and KAMELOT. We asked him to make some keyboards on the new album

so we can have a special feeling for some songs. He said OK, and on *Hollow Hideaway* we have something special at the beginning of the song. It's the most melodic song on the whole album, so it fits on that one I think. But we're still a band without a keyboarder, and I'm sure nobody miss the keyboards when we're playing live.

I guess this last question's going to be, if you could only take two songs of BRAINSTORM to keep, and the rest would disappear into the abyss, which two would you keep and why?

I think *Blind Suffering*, the opening track of *Metus Mortis*, because it shows best the two sides of BRAINSTORM. It's hard, it's melodic, but it's still aggressive. Also *Crush Depth*, the opening track of *Ambiguity*, this is a funny story, when I was in the studio I had no idea about any lyrics or vocal lines, and the band said "This will be the opening track." Thank you very much people, I have no idea about this song! So I started writing some really stupid lines, and then changed a lot of things. It's very cool, and it's one of the highlights I've ever sang on. It really rocks. You have to see the people screaming *Crush Depth*!

Any final words worth?

Thanks to all the readers out there for your support, and hopefully check out *Metus Mortis*! If you have so much fun listening to *Metus Mortis* as we had writing *Metus Mortis*, soon we'll have fun in the clubs and we'll kick some ass real soon there in the States.

Discography

BRAINSTORM:

*Hungry** (1997 BO Records)

*Unholy** (1998 BO Records)

Ambiguity (2000 Metal Blade)

Metus Mortis (2001 Metal Blade)

(*Franck not on these albums)

with SYMPHORCE:

Truth to Promises (1999 Noise)

Sinctuary (2000 Noise)

with IVANHOE:

Visions and Reality (1994 WMMS)

Symbols of Time (1995 WMMS)

Polarized (1997 WMMS)

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www.symphorce.net

www.ivanhoe.net

www.noiserecords.com

www.metalblade.com

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HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE, who had the #1 album of 2001 as far as LotFP is concerned, posted the following news update at their site: "Our new album has been recorded almost entirely. We worked at Tim Green's Louder Studios (home of the FUCKING CHAMPS, the MELVINS etc.) throughout this past December, and did some additional recording at Trackworx studio. All that remains to be done are a few vocal tracks and a few guitar solos (that's right, guitar solos). The whole monster will be completed in late March, and mixed in early April of 2002. Overall, this album (as yet untitled) is coming out way darker, slower, heavier and more diverse than *The Bastard*, and is sure to cause some confusion for those with their pigeonholes at the ready, ha ha! The total running time is about an hour and 15 minutes... Also: We are still technically an unsigned band. We are bleeding dry every resource we have in order to finance this new recording ourselves. Any label interested in releasing our next album should get in touch! Donations from "patrons of the arts" are also still being graciously accepted. In other words...HELP! Now for the Bad News... It looks like Janis Tanaka be will be busy touring the globe with various other, "larger" acts for most of 2002. Unfortunately this means that HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE has been left with a choice: either roll over and die for a year, or try to find a replacement for Janis. Of course, we have opted for the latter course of action, as difficult as this seems. Janis' presence and awesome talent will be sorely missed, and we all congratulate her on her recent successes, and wish her the best of luck in all of her adventures. On the bright side, Janis has completed all of her tracks for our new album, and we will undoubtedly continue to work with her in the future, when she is available, on HAMMERS and other musical projects. This means the following:- There will be no live shows for a while. If you want to see us play live again, please help us find a bassist/singer! -At the moment we are holding auditions... If you wish to try out for HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE, you must be a female singer (that means actual singing, not screaming or growling), who can play the fuck out of the bass (or guitar, and willing to play bass). Drug addicts are discouraged, but functioning stoners/smokers/drinkners are fine. We rehearse in San Francisco's SOMA district. Some have suggested that we simply get two separate people: a bass player and "girl singer", thereby becoming a 5 piece. We have thought about this, and we don't like the idea for the following reason: there aren't enough female vocal parts to keep a free standing singer busy throughout our set, and she would spend long passages onstage doing nothing but standing there and feeling stupid. We want to remain a four-piece. If you would like to try out, or know someone who does, please email me (John C.) at unholycadaver@mindspring.com"... Cool news from the Hammerheart camp: "We are extremely proud to announce that we signed Greece metal-legends SEPTIC FLESH to our roster. The band will enter the Swedish Fredman-studio in May to record their first album for Hammerheart Records. According to the band we can expect 'a fine mix between the old stuff and modern death metal. Melody meets brutality and ingenious songwriting', like we are used from them on their previous albums. The photo-shoot/artwork will be done by the famous FX Masters (the Alafouzou brothers) in Greece, also known for cinema and TV-productions. Within a few weeks the band starts the pre-production for their yet untitled new album and a release is scheduled for October. After the release the band is also very eager to hit the road again..." "SPOCK'S BEARD is in the studio recording their sixth studio CD...or rather CDs! It looks like it's going to be a double. "It's sort of like having twins." comments Morse, "they're coming whether we like it or not! There just seems to be so much good material we decided to go on ahead and record it all". The music has all the emotional highs and lows that have become associated with the writings of Neal Morse. There are some of the trademark Spock's styles, but there is substantial ground covered here that is completely new. The material is full of energy, and rocks harder than anything that has come before it. While reluctant to

comment on specifics of this double-release, Neal said "Think Snow!"... Nuclear Blast is releasing the debut of an album called THE DEFACED in February, saying they sound like PANTERA, METALLICA, PANTERA, and ZACK WYLDE. The selling point is the band has members of SOILWORK and DARKANE... About the release of the upcoming LOCKUP *Hate Breeds Suffering*: "Nuclear Blast America ran into some production problems with Sony America, who refused to manufacture the disc because the cover was deemed 'pornographic.' The matter was quickly resolved by moving production to another manufacturer in Canada. The art remains unchanged and uncensored. The minor setback shouldn't affect street date. Fans can plan on picking this grindcore monster up on February 19th..."The recording is done. The mixing is done. SOILWORK's fourth album, *Natural Born Chaos*, is complete. Peter Wichers (guitar) has this to say about their labor of love: 'Well, what can I tell you guys? After many long days and nights, we managed to forge together the strongest SOILWORK album ever. Working side by side with Devin Townsend and Fredrik Nordström was a real pleasure. Everyone plays very well on the album, but the main credit should be given to Björn "Speed" Strid. He has a fucking amazing voice, and he is really the one who stands out on this recording. Fredrik, Devin and myself took a long time setting up the sound, making sure that all the crazy shit going on was mixed properly. The mix took 10 days, which means that we took about 1 day per song. This proved to be a wise idea, because the end result sounds AMAZING! The songs are better arranged than the stuff we have done in the past. In other words, the album FUCKING KILLS! I can say that we have taken the sound from *A Predator's Portrait* and taken it to a new level. So go fucking get it!"... Sandra Schleret has returned to DREAMS OF SANITY, let the cheering commence!... DIO's Craig Goldy has been replaced by Doug Aldrich of HOUSE OF LORDS and LION fame. New album out this spring... From OVERKILL's website: "We had recently been put in a position to make band altering decisions... in short, label changes. Though our 'run' with CMC was quite positive, the merger with Sanctuary put us back in the 'crowded room'. I don't know about you guys, but I am just sick to fucking death with the reunion thing...stay the fuck home, you sucked in the 80's. I tell you it's like 1000 guys fighting over 2 urinals... eventually I am just going to piss where I'm standing. I guess we did... and got noticed... I am happy and proud to announce our new partnership with Spitfire Records, out of NY. Paul Bibeau the President and founder of this fine institution has made it possible for us to continue doing what we do. The enthusiasm and hunger at SPITFIRE, is evident in the fact that they are letting us do what we think is necessary for the band... definitely the way we like to work. We have already put the wheels in motion.... March 23, 2002, at the Paramount Theater, in Asbury Park, NJ, is the date slated for our second "LIVE" recording, for release. Also, the show will be video taped for an upcoming DVD release, that will contain the 90 minutes of footage compiled in the vid...*Batmen...The Return*, an historical view of the band." Not to be a complete dick or anything, but what is the real difference, to me as a fan, between a band that has reformed, or one that has just stayed around forever? You win 'cult points' for sticking it out I guess, but it really shouldn't matter, should it? They wouldn't dare be criticizing IRON MAIDEN, would they? Sure, *Brave New World* wasn't good, but MAIDEN pays all of Sanctuary's bills for sure. Who else are the Sanctuary bigwigs? HALFORD? That's a new band, not a reformation. QUEENSRÿCHE? They stuck it out, same as OVERKILL. Who are all these reformed bands, and if we think about it, why wasn't OVERKILL pushed straight to the top of the pile by Sanctuary? And more importantly, is there a label on this planet that really should make OVERKILL their #1 priority in the year 2002?

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New This Week
AGATHODAIMON *Chapter III*
9- 42:54 Nuclear Blast

Returning for battle in the sort-of-black metal wars is this band from Germany. They're aiming directly at the LotFP reader I think, with their extreme metal with acoustics style, filled in with multiple vocal styles. People really have to work on their marketing, because you can't believe the horrible press photo that was sent along with this (all the guys around a limo with scantily clad whorish women around them... way to be serious, guys), but no lyrics. The image is the opening of their website as well. What message is that going to send? Is the band glummy or not? Despite their corporate black metal image, they're a good band, but I've never felt a need to keep either of their previous albums. I do think this one's going to avoid suffering the same fate. *Chapter III*'s strength is the riff, and the arrangements of those riffs, being best when they aren't blasting all over the place, and when they creatively change things up with the heavy and not so heavy music (couple that with the growl/clean vocal tradeoffs and you have gems like Yesterday's Reprise to strengthen you album... good stuff), they win. Following Yesterday's Reprise up with the acoustic-electric lead-synth Departure can't fail when it's played that well. This is not from the world of black metal, and in a band that's pretty much built on black metal styles, and even when it kicks in, dual vocals and a slower pace makes it stick in the brain. Again, they succeed when they don't blast, but actually play play their hearts out in a sane environment that's built around songs and emotion instead of corpsepaint and gargoyles (or girls and limousines). Then a piano ballad/crusher that is Sacred Divinity? What the hell was all that shit at the beginning of the album? This album's subversive. Ending the album smartly with a death metal midpacer with groove and an absolutely killer riff for the main verse (yet breaking the momentum with the atmospheric breaks...), AGATHODAIMON's changed my mind about them. The band's got talent, and if this was their first album, I might be their biggest fan. As it is, we're three albums in and the band's finally shown great signs of life. Excellent, and I guess album four will determine if this band can keep it going, tweak what needs to be tweaked, stay away from the goddamned blast beats, and deserve their place among metal's greats. www.agathodaimon.de

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BORKNAGAR *Empiricism*
10 50:08 Century Media

I've had this album a good while and it vexes me. Introducing bass player Tyr and new vocalist Vintersorg (no cute name? Dusky A. Whirlpool?), and that's after having a new drummer and keyboard player and bassist the album before. *Empiricism* is not a bad album, let me make that clear, because before I'm done, you'll think I think it is. I think the lineup changes are the problem, because I had the same issue with *The Archaic Course*. The band went through a progression between *Borknagar* and *The Olden Domain*, and then stopped short. They began again on *The Archaic Course*, progressed to *Quintessence*, and now, bang, stopped again. Sure, songwriter Oystein G. Brun is a constant, Jens Ryland's been around three albums now, but then Lars Nedland has SOLEFALD, Vintersorg has VINTERSORG and OTYG, Asgeir Mickelson has SPIRAL ARCHITECT. Does BORKNAGAR exist? I wrote that, intending it to be facetious, but the more I think about it, I don't really have an answer. The band's in transition, again. I love and want to love BORKNAGAR, but as long as they are going to get a new hairstyle and new wardrobe every time they go out, I can hardly picture them in my mind, let alone brag about them to my friends. *Empiricism* might as well be stuck in the middle of whatever the hell is on the cover of *The Archaic Course* as far as being comforting. The album opens up with a blast beat and that's the extent of extremity of the album musically (Vintersorg growls it up big time all over the album though), and settles into that midpaced, atmospheric, progressive, used-to-be-black metal method of being that will scare away the more melodic metal fans scared to get into darker things (although BORKNAGAR's not very dark) and won't be powerful enough for the extreme metal fans (although BORKNAGAR's not weak by any stretch of the imagination). It's a hell of a place to be and that such a

band is on a big metal label and has survived and grown and has notoriety is a complete victory for metal. They're original and impossible to pigeonhole, making categorization impossible, so forgive my vagueness in describing their sound independently and just comparing themselves to their past. The highlights here are for sure the keyboards and the rhythm section. I guess now's as good a time as any to point out the great production that makes everything come through clear. It's not perfect (I hear the drums, but don't feel them... and the guitars are never buried by synth but they're never blazing either... although I strongly believe that to be an artistic decision and not an engineering issue). Anyway, Lars Nedland isn't making hooks with his keyboard lines as he does with SOLEFALD, but he uses about 50 different instrument simulations, and then sounds that don't quite exist in real life, to add spice and flavor, and at times, the main melody of the songs. His use of a real grand piano is cool, although having the bass and drums interact with the piano as on Four Elements Synchronicity leaves a 'floofy prog' feeling that seems to fit uncomfortably on the band. The rhythm section is beyond expert, with Asgeir just plain showing off all over the place, dare I say overplaying his parts? I'm not one to complain about showing what you got, but when the rest of the music comes down, Asgeir's still got the jitters and is just being cute. There's plenty of opportunities to show off in this band, but when quiet is called for, why am I hearing it filled in with many 'prog drumming showing off the mellow way' percussion hits? Eek. Tyr's perfectly employed, as the bass works off of whatever instrument is convenient, never stepping on anyone's toes. And fully audible in the mix, which is noteworthy in itself. As to the real tragedy here (tragedy as in "Where are my keys?"), not tragedy as in "Shit! Mom's died!"), Vintersorg is misused. OK, I'll accept that the '50 million layers' approach they were using with Simen Hestnaes wasn't going to continue, which is a shame, but after hearing Vintersorg's vocals on *Cosmic Genesis* (where he's writing everything so of course his voice will be used to maximum advantage) and the HAVAYOTH album, he's just not clicking here. Yet. I've enjoyed his lower register, melodic singing where get the chance to sing in a big, sweeping way. BORKNAGAR's really busy music, and it's just my preference, but he's singing too fast, I think, and even when he's singing to his ability, the music's not supporting his voice so much as expressing its own. Such a conflict may be 'progressive', but it's not building to the strengths of the personnel they have. I'm sure Vintersorg needs to take control a bit more, as this album's the first one where I feel the vocals haven't been a highlight, and I know he's got it in him. The lyrics (which are written by him, Lars, Asgeir, Tyr, and/or Oystein depending on the song) aren't the most compelling thing in the world. That's one thing that made perfect, 100% sense about *The Olden Domain*. The Viking theme might not be the most original thing in the history of metal, but the songs were ones you could sing along to, and the absolute classic ending ('Autumn twice, river and rock...') was entirely in the clever wording and awesome melody (which Simen changed live, I have to add). Since Simen came along and the band's on this cosmic way of the universe kick, I haven't understood jack shit about what they were talking about, and it might as well all be in Norwegian. How's this for poetry, as heard on the opening song The Genuine Pulse (lyrics by Brun): "As the salt in the sea/burns in me/Forever the taste in your mouth is I/Eternising the soul soaked estate/Solvable as fractional fragments'. Fractional fragments? Vintersorg's not much better (*Cosmic Genesis* is as incomprehensible as all this is, but similar in theme... he's the only man that made logical sense for this job, partially because there's a lack of logical sense in fulfilling the conceptual requirements!), coming up with such words as 'vicissitude' to sing, and lovely lines like 'like a sine curve in an endless loop'. I'm not an idiot, I know what the intended overall meaning is here in an overall sense, but boy do they take the most awkward means to express it and Vintersorg's inability to stretch out syllables is hurting the band. They also have Vintersorg narrating way too much. I can deal with the abundance of black metal vocals coming from his throat.

No problem, BORKNAGAR's built on that balance. But it's weak to have spoken narration behind studio effects-period. Instead of doing that, how about getting busy and progressive with the instruments at THOSE times and ditch the spoken vocals? Doesn't help that the end of the album is The View of Everlast, with tons of those spoken vocals. And I'm sorry, when I see the word 'everlast', I'm thinking boxing fashion. Am I evil for that? I guess in the end, my complaint is that there's no Svartskogs Gilde, no Winterway (hell, there isn't a weak song on *Olden Domain*, it's their best album and I don't even like Garm), no Ad Noctum, no Presence is Ominous. Two and a half months would certainly be enough to find such a thing on this album, wouldn't it? The best song that is on Empiricism is Inherit the Earth, a slower number that gives Vintersorg his opportunity to breathe, has acoustic guitar, and gives everyone their space, including a cool drums/bass/keys break in the action. More interesting than 90% of metal but hardly the kind of driving song I'd be able to hand to others and say was representative of the album. So then, on to the packaging, and this should only be a concern for the European digipak, but it's fucking sloppy. The songs in the booklet aren't in the same order as on the CD, everything's in this font which is not suitable for reading clearly, which is just silly for a 'deluxe' edition. At least some of the problems on the US version are to be fixed, according to Asgeir. So there's a lot of bitching and nitpicking at the album, which some of you are going to think I'm absolutely insane to be doing. Perhaps. It's a credit to the album that there's this kind of depth to withstand such things though, wouldn't you say? Again, there's much to enjoy and marvel at on this album. For each nitpick, there's instrumental interaction that blows me away. A nitpick, if you will. It's just that BORKNAGAR is not an average band, they've done what I consider classic albums, and they are to be judged against a standard of perfection, and nothing less is acceptable. I bought this in November and I'd never ask for my money back on it, and if I was there again I'd buy it again. BORKNAGAR's done much with *Empiricism*. But they can do so much more, and I fully demand the next album to destroy the world, as their other even-numbered albums have. www.borknagar.com

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CARNAL FORGE *Please... Die!*
12-37:11 Century Media

Do we HAUNTED much? I have to admit, I had to step away from this album a bit because if you'd read the news section in early December, I was making fun of this release weeks before I'd ever heard it. Just because their first two albums sucked ass, I couldn't be allowed to write a scathing review without seriously listening to see if they still deserved it. Fact is, it's better than *Firedemon*. Sure, it's almost impossible to not be, but it is an improvement. In truth, it has a lot of energy. No depth, none at all, but it's got energy. No originality either, which peeves me at the end of three complete listens. When listening to this, I literally start singing along to songs that aren't on this album, but rather songs from the HAUNTED's debut. That's pretty damn sad. Isn't that the kiss of death for an album? Obviously this third generation SLAYER stuff is going over well with the kids, or else it wouldn't be popping up on record labels as much as it is, but come on guys, you're competent with your instruments, you're tight, so do something else with your aggression, please? In the end, if you want an album that sounds like THE HAUNTED with that touch of Gothenburg, you wouldn't waste your money in getting this. Yet we all know that if this band never existed, the world wouldn't be missing a damned thing, not an angel in heaven nor a demon in hell would be sorry that humanity was not able to experience any of these songs, so why don't you just go ahead and save your money and buy a pizza instead? www.carnalforge.com

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PUNGENT STENCH *Masters of Mortal Servants of Sin*
10-26:41 (faded) Nuclear Blast

Honestly, my previous PUNGENT STENCH experience comes from seeing a live show, and all I can remember is a cover of ZZ TOP's *Sharp Dressed Man*. So any comparisons to the old days are right out the window, and

boy oh boy is PUNGENT STENCH a fun thing in 2002. Rather not-so-interesting stuff I think, simple songs designed to have a catchy riff or beat, death metal style, deliver its sick little message, and get out. For example, School's Out Forever, from what I can make out of the lyrics, is about Columbine or something similar. You know, getting your trenchcoat, your sawed off shotgun, look at the song title and there you go. I can make out pretty graphic bits here. I can't make out the lyrics to Rex Paedophilus, Mortuary Love Affair, or the Convent of Sin because of the rough vocals, but I think we can imagine which direction they're going in with it. Let me say that my promo copy is also 'faded', so I'm missing about half of tracks four through ten. Some journalists complain, but from the material on offer here, let's be honest, I don't think I missed anything. The STENCH always had a reputation for being quite, um, distasteful, and they fully live up to that, at least. There's an attempt at shock value here but the songs all sound the same, so I really think I'll just keep my MACABRE and leave this alone. www.pungent-stench.de

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Reader Comments
TYPUS AND PROOFING

There are but two obsessions in my life: my wife and music, specifically, music of the metal kind. Similarly, there are two musical publications that I endorse: Metal Maniacs and Lamentations of the Flame Princess. The former is, regrettably, but a shadow of its former self what with Jeff Wagner, Ula Gehret, S. Craig Zahler, Marty Rytkonen, and several other extremely talented writers fleeing the organization like so many rats jumping off a sinking ship (but that's another rant for another time). The latter, your own creation, now stands in my mind as the premier weekly (re)source for metal enthusiasts- period. Your nascent writing style is still developing, but you've already avoided the two major pitfalls that so many music journalists invariably fall into: either being overly conversational or overly academic in the writing approach. I've been a reader of LotFP since August 2000, so I've seen the steady improvements in your writing from issue to issue- and sometimes from online review/interview to, well, you get the idea. On that note, you might recall us conversing a few times about your need for a copy editor (proofreader).

Herewith, I've enclosed a sampling of my own proofreading abilities, which I hope you'll not take as affrontery, but as constructive criticism... I am now volunteering my proofing abilities to Lamentations of the Flame Princess. Totally unsolicited though my proffering might be, you definitely need a proofreader as you'll see in the edit sheet that I've included...

Garth Ferrante
New Jersey

(Included with this letter was a copy of three reviews from Issue #11 with 40 usage/typo errors and other mistakes pointed out, many of which are either judgments on word choices, or things I don't see as errors to be corrected because I write as I would speak, so the 100% 'correct' English isn't what I'm going for anyway... but at the same time, very many legitimate 'oopsies' in just those three reviews.) I definitely wanted to address this in the newsletter because A- I want to stress that I don't hide from criticism, and B- this criticism is definitely warranted. I remember when I first started subscribing to the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* (which the entire idea of a weekly newsletter, and the format of it, was stolen from, www.wrestlingobserver.com), Dave Meltzer was (and is) writing 16 pages every week. Typos were all over the place, and in some cases to the point where the entire meaning of important points were lost. As an English nerd myself (don't you have to be to even want to write this much on a continuous basis?) I offered my proofing services, as did several others across the country at various times. It didn't happen, and three months into this endeavor, it's obvious why. There isn't time. There are weeks I wake up at 6am to finish writing and then right away am off to the printers at 9am, doing a final read-through on the bus. It's not pretty and I go insane the next day reading some of it, but there simply isn't time to write it, send it to someone to proof it, get it back, and still have

this done in the required time. So I regret that unless a proofreader moves in next door or something (and even then they'd have to be on moment's alert every Friday), this thing is going to be a minor mess. If there's ever any question as to what I mean with something, any reader is welcome to email me, and if I completely mangle something, it is my policy to acknowledge and correct it in print, as I did by printing Scott Crinklaw's letter last week concerning the SCHOLOMANCE vocals. Oh, and I typed Garth's letter in as he sent an honest to gosh letter, so any typos there are mine and not Garth's...

LAMENTATIONS OF THE FLAME PRINCES

WEEKLY

LotFP Weekly Issue #15/16 February 5, 2002

The leading news item this week is that The End Records has secured rights to release the new ARCTURUS album, *The Sham Mirrors*, for North America. This is a step forward for the label, as both previous ARCTURUS full-length albums, *Apera Hiems Symfonia* and *La Masquerade Infernale*, were monumental landmarks in heavy metal, not to mention the 'all-star' lineup associated with the band, and the fact that previous albums were released by Century Media and Music for Nations so the band's well known- a first for the label. All is not roses on the announcement though. Kristoffer 'Garm' Rygg hasn't exactly put out material pleasing to my ears (What I've heard of ULVER's *Perdition City* might have well been a blank CD for all I cared) and some have been quite offensive (*The Disguised Masters* album destroying the songs ARCTURUS had already done, for example, and his destruction of some HAGALAZ RUNEDANCE songs with this electronic/techno/whatever remixes.) Add in drummer Hellhammer's latest works with MAYHEM and KOVENANT, and I'm even more apprehensive. I love and adore the previous studio albums, but I can't think of another release that'll be coming out this year that I find myself dreading, and almost not wanting to know what it sounds like, because I absolutely do not want it to be something I'd hate. The release date is going to be April 9, also the date of the new WINDS album, *Reflections of the I*, which may be another issue of contention. The last WINDS release was a very ARCTURUSy sounding EP, and if that trend continues, they're in danger of being buried by having a release the same day in this market. Then again, I haven't a clue what either will sound like, so we shall see, the WINDS might wind up what the ARCTURUS should have been...

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Sanctuary/Metal-Is and IRON MAIDEN are conspiring to rip off the fans, or supply a needed product to the market, depending on your viewpoint. They have a new live album that will be out March 26, even though that will be their FIFTH such thing. Also on that date, all studio albums from *Iron Maiden* on up to *Virtual XI* will be re-released, as will *Live After Death*, *Live at Donnington*, *A Real Live One*, and *A Real Dead One*. *Best of the Beast* will also be re-released later this year as a box set. Also, the reissues will include coupons, and if you collect six coupons, you can mail in for a copy of *The Soundhouse Tapes* on CD. LotFP's official stance on this is: FUCK IRON MAIDEN, FUCK SANCTUARY, FUCK METAL-IS. I mean everyone in the band and involved with their label/management can line up at my toilet and eat my shit. This entire catalog (well, up through *Fear of the Dark*) was re-issued by Castle Records, not remastered but all CDs including a bonus CD of B-side and rare material appropriate for the album. Then in 1998 Raw Power re-released everything AGAIN (through *Live at Donnington*), this time re-mastered but with no bonus tracks (unless you count Total Eclipse on *Number of the Beast*). Now, three and a half years later, they're reissuing them AGAIN, remastered, but with only a couple bonus tracks apiece, in 'special packaging', and they expect everyone to buy them AGAIN? And it's bad enough that these people had fans buy *Virtual XI* at all... and now they're giving it to us AGAIN? Instead of collecting coupons for a rare CD (which is the only one many fans might actually not have, so notice they're making you buy six albums you already have to get it), how about a program, where I can send you the CDs I already fucking have to get a discount on buying the new fucking versions of albums I already fucking have? Can you imagine the exploitation of the die-hard MAIDEN fan here? If they've been around since the glory days, they had some of these albums on vinyl or cassette, then upgraded to CD, then 'oh, CDs with a bonus disc!', then 'oh, remastered CDs!', not to mention all of the concert tickets, T-shirts, and whatever other merchandise they might have bought, and now they are expected to say, 'oh, special vinyl-artwork looking sleeves!' Hey, you greedy, stupid motherfuckers, how about giving us a worthy studio

album, which you have not done for FOURTEEN YEARS now? Fuckers. Here's a contest for subscribers- send me an adaptation of an IRON MAIDEN song's lyrics which portrays them as dumb, greedy shits (you know, the kind of thing METALLICA has had done to them in recent years), and the best one earns the writer four issues added to their subscription.

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About a couple months ago, the story about OPETH intending to record and release two albums simultaneously broke. Their European tour with KATATONIA and NOVEMBRE was imminent, and I was hoping to get to talk to OPETH leader Mikael Akerfeldt, even saying "comments next week..." in these pages. Well, that obviously didn't happen, but earlier this month, after the tour concluded, I did get to speak to Mr. Akerfeldt. We summed up the Year in Opeth 2001, and then there were questions about what exactly he was thinking on these upcoming albums...

We're actually supposed to get the most snowfall here in ten years.

It's the same here. There hasn't been much snow in the past couple years, but it's black metal winter!

I talked to a few people in Sweden and Finland and they've been telling me it's real bad.

I went into town today to buy a few records, and the subway was just so delayed, like we'd never had a winter before in Sweden. It's weird. It's like five or six hours just to get to a record store.

So what did you buy?

I bought ALICE COOPER, *Pretties for You*, the first album. I bought a UK original OF JETHRO TULL's *Aqualung*, LOVE SCULPTURE, an album called *Blues Helping*, and [some Swedish guy whose name there ain't no way I can pick out... oops.]

What's the last real metal album you've bought?

I actually went into town a couple of days ago to buy stuff I wanted on CD. YNGWIE MALMSTEEN *Trilogy* and *Odyssey*, and a couple of SCORPIONS reissues, *Virgin Killer* and *In Trance* on the same CD with a book.

I've got that one!

And *Taken By Force*, remastered.

How come we can't talk without YNGWIE popping up somewhere in the conversation?

He's the only famous Swede in metal apart from all the death and black metal bands we have. And EUROPE. I'm proud of YNGWIE.

2001 was definitely a huge year for OPETH, probably the biggest ever. For the first real question of an interview here, what is your take on where OPETH is at the beginning of 2002?

We've become one of those small bands, but we're big, you know? I think a lot of people have heard of us by now. Before we put out *Blackwater Park*, it was a small amount of devoted fans that were looking forward to *Blackwater Park*. Now we got out to a lot of people that normally wouldn't listen to bands to OPETH. Nu metal kids. This album got a lot bigger exposure in the magazines, and a proper release in the States. The main reason we sold a lot of albums on this one is because of our record company in the US who did a tremendous job getting it out there. I don't know how many copies we sold, but it's a lot. They fixed so many things for us, all of a sudden we're doing regular interviews with Guitar World magazine, stuff like that. It's weird. Right now, I think we have more eyes on us about what we're going to do next. It's not a different situation for us because we're always going to be the same. We don't care. Obviously there's more people. *Blackwater Park* has by far been the most successful album we've put out. There's going to be a lot of more people who are going to complain about the next release, and a lot more people who are going to love the next stuff. We're one step bigger.

This past year you also did a lot of touring.

Yeah, three months! It's a lot for us. When we came back from the European tour, we had this and that offer from the States to go back and do another month, or two months. No way! Three months is way beyond our limit. A week of gigs,

then we're exhausted. Three months, it's tough. We just got back home two weeks ago.

It was cool reading on the internet, every night there'd be someone that was at that show that would be posting a review of the concert. Of all the touring that you did this year, which touring lineup did you enjoy best?

It was three different tours. AMORPHIS was cool, we've never met those guys before. They were Scandinavian and we're pretty much the same kind of people. Not a big surprise. NEVERMORE was the bum tour for me. I've never been drinking so much as I have on that tour. It's because Warrel had a little stash in his bed with vodka and he brought me in because I was the lead singer, you have to have some kind of communication there through the bottle. So we were drinking, and I was hammered every night for two months. It's fun, and I see the pictures afterwards and fuck, I'm wasted on every picture. The KATATONIA tour, we know each other so well so there's no surprises. I didn't drink a lot this tour. But obviously it was a bit more exciting than the other tour because we were headlining. It was cool. The most fun, that I was having a really really good time, that was the NEVERMORE tour. Because I was so drunk! I like to get drunk.

I get the feeling just from the shows I was at for both US swings, you guys should have been the headliner the whole time.

I don't know. A lot of people told me that, but it's still a fact in the States that we're a smaller name than NEVERMORE. Maybe not anymore. When we did that tour, we wouldn't be comfortable headlining over a band like Nevermore. I would never want to headline over them. It's a respect thing. I don't care, it's the same situation with OPETH and bands bigger than us that I wouldn't open for. NEVERMORE, I wouldn't have them open for us because of respect, especially now that we've been on tour with them. It's not going to happen.

How do you keep your clean voice up doing that roaring every night? I've got a couple copies of shows you've done this year and your voice seems to be stronger on the European tour than it was on the US tour which is weird because it's after you'd been wasting it more and more.

I thought I had a steel voice. I would never have any problems. But I'll tell you, on the European tour, everybody on the bus got sick. It was like the flu or something. I got sick. Somewhere in Germany I had problems with my normal voice, like <makes off key strained sound> where I have no control. I was like 'Oh shit, tomorrow I have to rest! I'm not going to do soundcheck tomorrow and hopefully I'll get better.' We did a show in Germany, and I didn't do the soundcheck. I was going to sing the normal voice part on The Leper Affinity, I'm all alone with my guitar. I couldn't sing. There was no voice! Just <makes squealing sound>. It was so embarrassing. I've never been that embarrassed in my life! My self esteem just took a dive. The gig after that in Hamburg we did an instrumental set with the audience singing. It was weird. It was not an OPETH show, but it was a cool experience, I'll never forget it. My voice is perhaps more well trained but I also got a pretty bad example of what can happen if you don't take care of your voice. I was sick and I was drinking and I was smoking and the day after it was gone. I didn't know that could happen to me. Apparently it does happen to me to.

How are the guys from NOVEMBRE? When Dan Swanö was here in Atlanta, he had some wild stories about them but that was five or six years ago.

I think they were pretty calm, you know? They're Italian, so they have a taste for girls. That's what I could see anyway. But a couple of the guys in the band are hooked with girlfriends now. They didn't drink that much. I think they smoke weed and stuff like that but no bad stories about them. They took it easy.

I was happy when I found out they were getting the tour. Wasn't GOD FORBID supposed to be on the European tour?

It was a pretty bad situation, that one, but we had to do what we had to do. We became friends with them on the US tour, we're still friends with them, it's not a problem, it's just we had a little problem with the drums. We left our drum kit with

them because we couldn't take it on the plane back home. They were supposed to leave the drum kit at the Premier in New Jersey. It just didn't happen. We didn't get the drums until a week or two weeks before the [European] tour, so we couldn't rehearse. It just got to a point where it was ridiculous and everybody was blaming each other. We were just asking "Where's the drums?" It didn't arrive! I don't know who's fault it was. They were saying it was the Premier's fault, but I didn't care anymore. It got to a situation where I had been talking to all of the labels and all of the agencies that we wanted GOD FORBID on the tour, and it felt like they were not doing us a favor in return. They were causing us problems. We had to put our foot down and say "You can't do this to us." That's basically the reason why we didn't bring them on tour.

On these tours, in the US at least, you had a lot bigger crowds than I was expecting for you. Especially that one in Chicago, there was a ton of people there. How were the crowds overall?

In the States it was cool, we did two or three shows that weren't good. The worst was in Kansas, Topeka, Kansas it was? It was I think 42 people? They had a tornado warning or something? 42 people, but we sold 21 shirts. Half the people bought OPETH shirts. Overall, most of the gigs were great. I don't know if they were full, but a lot of people came to the shows. I think the show in Atlanta was one of the best one. Brooklyn, Los Angeles was really really good. Chicago of course, that first time was better than the seconds time.

That House of Blues, I can not believe that venue.

I love it. It's the best venue I've ever seen. The backstage rooms, the food, everything was just so professional, so every time we come to a venue now, we always compare it to them. That is a castle compared to the shitholes we play. It's just marvelous, I would do anything to play there again.

What did you think of the Atlanta venue?

It was cool too. It was pretty big, I think. It looked like a German beer house! Wooden decorated, pretty nice. I can't remember how many people came to that show but it was more than half full, anyway. Most of the American shows were good. I remember one was bad because we were thrown offstage. We couldn't do Demon of the Fall. I don't know why, it was St. Louis I think.

I am glad to see on the European tour you were playing Bleak and When.

A lot of people didn't know When. They didn't recognize the song! I was under the impression that this was one of the most wanted songs from the fans. This is the song they want to hear! But they were like "Huh? Is this a cover?" We played it anyway. Bleak is always cool, but I always have problems, especially when I got that cold.

Looking to the future now. Just before you left for the tour, Digital Metal broke the news about the plans for doing a two CD release sometime in the future. Just wanting to know the status of that, and if that's still the working plan?

Yeah, definitely. When we played in London, we had a day off, so I had a meeting with Andy Black with Music For Nations. Just tried to convince him that we really wanted to do this. He was like "I don't know," because it's a weird thing. Not the most common thing in extreme metal to put out two CDs. They're a bit scared and cautious. They were telling me, "Maybe the fans will feel ripped off." I feel it's the other way around, you know?

Have you heard what AYREON did [in 2000], and then MAUDLIN OF THE WELL [in 2001]. There's a precedence for it. Did you manage to convince them?

I did. I had to lie somewhat. He wanted us in the studio in February. I was like "Sure, sure." That's impossible, but I had to lie to get him to be like "OK guys." We're going to try and start recording in April so we can have a September release. I'm not sure. If we're going to do a thing like this, there won't be any compromises. There's not going to be any fillers. It will be 100% highest quality all the time, you know? After *Blackwater Park*, I was like "Should I just do another fucking album? Record, tour, blah blah blah?" We're in the wheel, so to speak. That's not what we wanted to do. And I think it's a good move for us, in many ways. The main reason we want to do this is because it's a challenge for us. Another important reason is that people probably expect us to ride the wave of the success of *Blackwater Park* and just do another album like that. Play it safe. I'm willing to risk or entire future with this. For ourselves as musicians, I think this is the right move and the right time for OPETH.

As soon as that news hit, there were rumors flying all around.

Death: Rebirth?

The main one I heard was that there was a contractual problem. Music For Nations had you for so many albums, and that they didn't want to knock two albums off at once. I didn't even discuss that. It's rumor spreading. If we were a bigger band, if we were LED ZEPPELIN, we would have two records and in the contract it would count as two options. We want to do it so much it's going to be the same, it's going to be counted as one album, even though it will be two. All the money is going to count for one album. For the company it's a golden deal. The reason I'm not even going to discuss that with the company is because we really want to do this. There isn't going to be any business in the way. We're the ones losing financially. We're going to lose money.

You going to rehearse more than a few times for this one? We have to. We have to shorten down the recording time. Three times for over one hundred minutes of music. Three times won't really cut it this time. We have to rehearse.

Jeff Wagner had a large forum to do it in, and I have never seen a band be almost chastised in public for the bad way they conduct their finances and how they record.

We don't care. We don't care about that stuff. I care if I can go out and buy ALICE COOPER records. We had a meeting with a manager, and you know, managers! We don't deal with managers! We're just losers, you know? I met up with this guy who might be taking care of our business in the future, I don't know yet. He was asking me all these questions, and I was like "I don't know. I don't know." I had no idea. Everything was about money and the bottom line of all the questions was whether we were ripped off or not. We're ripped off big time! He said our record contract is shit, "How could you possibly agree to this?" He asked us about advances in the merchandise contract and it was like "Huh? What advances?" I felt really stupid. I tried to angle it to my advantage in a way. I don't care about the business, all I want to do is the music. The business, I don't care about that shit. When I had this meeting with him, I started thinking maybe we would profit by having someone take care of our business. Then again, we're just a small shit band that nobody really cares about, in comparison. It's not even business for us yet. It's just a matter of being fooled bigtime or just a little. <laughs>

A lot of bands a lot smaller than you have broken up over business stuff.

Yeah, but that's just kids who think they're big rock stars. You should concentrate on the music, and the minute you start concentrate on business... We get some money, don't get me wrong. I'm not lying under a piece of cardboard in the street, you know. We get some kind of money. But we just want to concentrate on the music. It's the same with all the other guys in the band. It's a bit pathetic when you see a band that's put out one album and they have already a manager, two or three agencies across the world, and they can't even make a decent song, you know? I don't care about that shit. I want the business to come us as a relief. I don't want to talk to managers trying to convince them that we're a really good band, you know? We want the managers to flock to us. We're just going to continue thinking about the music only and not give a fuck about the business.

The one thing that did bug me about the announcement...

I know you've been friends with Chris [Dick, of Digital Metal] for a long time now, but when he broke the story, there was something in there that he was releasing news that hadn't been cleared with the other band members. That just seemed weird.

He was emailing me like you do sometimes. Not as a reporter or journalist, but just to stay in touch. He asked me, "So what are you going to do? Have you done some new stuff?" And I told him. It was just in the embryo stage. I hadn't even discussed it with the record company when he asked me, and I hadn't mentioned it with the other guys because we'd just gotten back from the US tour and we didn't want to talk. I just told him it was an idea. The next email I got was "Can I release this as news?" I don't know the power of Digital Metal! I didn't think anyone was going to read. Then the day after, poof! I was like oh shit, I have to talk to the other guys or they'll think I was going behind their backs or something! The company called me up a couple days later asking "What's this?" I felt like I was a manager, you know? Trying to fool someone. It was an idea I had. It was Jonas [Renske] from KATATONIA who told me to do two albums. Initially I wanted the next OPETH album to be really heavy. Fast and heavy and sick. But all I was writing was mellow stuff, with the occasional heavy thick riffs. I was like shit! This mellow stuff is pretty good! Should I leave it behind? He was like "Do two albums!" Hey, that's cool! Ever since *Morningrise*, the fans have been wanting a mellow album, they've been asking us about it. It's a good time.

What happened with the prog rock side project you were going to do with one of the guys from SPIRITUAL BEGGARS, and...

I talked to him today. He was supposed to come here. I had a New Years Eve party at my house and he was supposed to come. We're going to meet up, he's going to come down to Stockholm this weekend so we're going to meet up next week. Still nothing has happened with that, it's just been talk. I'm still as excited to work with the keyboard player as I was when I had the idea to do something with him. He's been busy, he has several projects and SPIRITUAL BEGGARS, I've been doing *Blackwater Park*. We haven't had the time to meet up. I'm not sure what's going to happen with that, we're just going to meet up and do something. My problem is everything I write sounds like OPETH. I want to see how he writes. It's more unusual because he's a keyboard player and I've never worked with a keyboard player. I know, from my own personal experience with a piano, if I keep to the white keys, everything sounds good, you know? I'd be real interested in writing something on the piano, so it would be interesting working with the keyboard player. If it's not going to generate a new project, it might spark my interest in something for OPETH.

How far into the writing of the two CDs are you?

I've done a couple of songs. They are in the early stages of songs. I'm concentrating on the mellow album, which is not going to be just Harvest or Face of Melinda kind of songs. I'm thinking of doing something psychedelic, OZRICS stuff! You know what I mean. Obviously Harvest kind of songs, hit songs. But also some spaced out shit. When I say mellow, it's not going to be just minor chords and 'boo hoo hoo' sobbing music. Maybe some easy stuff, but mellow if you know what I mean. And for the heavy CD, I'm just planning total sickness. I'm working on three or four songs simultaneously from the heavy song, maybe three or four songs on the mellow album. I don't know all together how long it's going to be. It's going to be no less than 50 minutes each, probably more. It would be way cooler to have sixty minutes each or more, just to have the feeling that this is really really not a fucking ripoff. I want to really stress that. The label was saying the fans would feel ripped off because they'll have to buy two albums that we could put on a double CD. But that's not as cool as putting out two separate albums at the same time. It's just a matter of taste. I feel it's the other way around. People still have a choice to buy both CDs. As I said, for the record company it's a golden deal. They get two albums for the price of one.

How much writing input do the other guys have?

Right now it's nothing. I don't write together with anybody else anymore. It's something I could do in the past but I can't do that anymore. The two Martins [Mendez and Lopez] probably don't have anything, Peter [Lindgren] might have a couple of riffs but I don't know yet.

It's not a situation where, say the Martins came up with something for the heavy CD, would there be a problem?

No no, not at all. It's very rare where there's four members in a band writes music. It just doesn't happen that often. There's one band in the history of music that's been able to do that successfully, and that's the BEATLES. And still they had Ringo Starr songs that sound like shit! They incorporated them to be nice. It's never going to be the case with me having a Martin Lopez track that's shit, you know? We're still going to have to have the 100% quality of the album. Since I've been the one writing the music in the past, I have the final say. I'm not going to have a great song by Martin Lopez and then not have it on the album because I'm jealous or because I want all the publishing royalties. It's going to be a matter of what we all feel is quality. It's also a matter of taste. He listens to stuff that I think is complete shit. I wouldn't be able to say if he comes up with a song that he thinks is OPETH, and he thinks it's 100%, and I think it's shit, it's a problem. And then you're going to have to use the hierarchy in the band, and someone's going to have to say no or yes. But it's never been a case of us recording songs as a band where the band members don't feel easy or happy with that particular song. It's always going to be a case of us recording songs that we like. All of us.

A lot of people into OPETH like the fact that it's two things. You have the mellow parts and the heavier parts. By separating those, how do you keep it...

It's not going to be separated. It's still going to be, the heavy CD, that's what people are most scared about. They think I'm going to leave out all the acoustic parts of the songs. It's not going to be case. It's just that the overall feeling of that CD is going to be heavier and thicker. If you say *My Arms Your Hearse*, it's a very fast and heavy record. It's OPETH. The only difference from before is that CD is probably going to be a bit faster, more evil. The mellow CD is going to be

something, it's the CD that's going to open up a few doors for us. I'm not saying it's going to be a commercial CD. It's pretty much going to be anti-commercial. It's going to open up doors for us in different directions. Probably opposite directions than commercial directions. A new way of OPETH for the future maybe.

Have you come up with a lyrical concept?

I don't know yet. I haven't written any lyrics, I don't have any idea. It sounds like it's going to be a concept album. I want the two CDs to be linked together. I want them to have similar artwork, but stripped down artwork-wise. Like one black CD and one white CD. I want them to be linked together because they are going to be released at the same time and I want there to be a connection between the two CDs. I'm not sure if it's going to be a concept or whatever. People are probably expecting me to do a big ass concept on this one. But I'm not sure.

For the artwork, are you going to go with Travis Smith again?

I don't know. He's great. I don't see any reason why we wouldn't use him again. But I really want to do something different this time. Maybe have artwork printed on the jewel case, or if it's going to be a digipak, have an embossed, something different than what we've done before.

I don't know how much public knowledge this is supposed to be yet, but the thing with the guys from ENTOMBED, PROJECT HATE, and CANDLEMASS...

It's, it's... I don't know what it is. It's apparently a doom kind of band, like TROUBLE or ST. VITUS.

ST. VITUS, TROUBLE, SABBATH and CANDLEMASS.

They asked me. I went to the release party for *Morning Star*. I'm friends with especially Leif from CANDLEMASS and Kentha Phillipson and I met the guys from ENTOMBED, we've been going to the same gigs forever. They wanted a singer and they asked me. Every time somebody asks me to sing, to be a vocalist, I'm not a singer! I can't sing. You should have a professional singer. In a weak moment I said I could try out. They told me they were going to fix a tape for me to hear what it sounded like, but I haven't got the tape. I don't know what it sounds like. I don't know if it's a side joke thing. I don't know what it is. I have to hear the tape before I make up my mind. But playing with those guys would be cool. Jorgen [Sandstrom] said that to me on tour, "Yeah, I'll make a tape for you!" It seems to be a real problem to get me that tape! I wouldn't cry if they found another singer. I don't want to be one of those guys that has 'projects', you know. It seems every time I mention the word project, or if somebody asks me about <in a snooty voice> 'my other project', it feels, ew, pretentious. <in a snooty voice again> 'I really have to work with music 100% of my time.' I want to concentrate on OPETH and that's it. Other projects are just to waste time and have a good time and maybe be invited to a few more parties. That's what it's going to be. But if it's good, sure.

What's up with BLOODBATH, then?

That's one of the things we are going to do. I'm not going to be involved in the writing of that one. I'm just going to come down and record the vocals and that's it. I think it's cool, but I'm not going to lose my head over some shitty death metal. It's cool, it's funny, it's probably going to be pretty good quality, but people are asking me "Hey, BLOODBATH..." We did that in a week and we were drunk as hell. I'm not going to be 100% serious about it. I talked to Jonas who talked to Dan, we're going to record in February or something and shop around for a label to release it for us.

Just from name value alone you should have a decent deal out of that.

It'll probably be Century Media, they're the ones that put out the first CD thing. I've talked to a couple of guys in the Century Media offices and they want it. Candlelight actually contacted me and they want it. My old label! Music For Nations asked "Why haven't you asked us?" I don't want a joke band on my own label! <laughs> I'm not trying to take the piss out of BLOODBATH, because it is quality, and I don't want to scare Century Media by saying it's a joke band. But it was born a joke band, we were doing it for fun. We're not going to have stage names or going to do world tours. It's going to be this little side thing just for fun.

As long as the guys writing the riffs don't say it's a joke band.

Maybe Dan and Anders will be angry with me. They're the ones going to write the music I think.

I remember Dan saying "No more side projects!" Now you look on his site and there's six he's putting together right now!

He's the master of side projects. He talks about them before they're even born. He's like spreading the word of me and him having a cock rock band, FIREHEART. I was down there

one time and we had a 15 minute discussion about cock rock. "We should have a band, ha ha!" Then I get back home and it's like "We have a new project getting started here, FIREHEART..." He's one of those guys, everything he records he can get released. He's on these labels more obscure than the other. I don't know that he ever gets any money for that. If he even signs a contract. I talk to him about business, I told you earlier that we're not business guys, but Dan, he's the worst! As far as I recall, he doesn't sign contracts, it's just word of mouth. "Yeah, you'll get a beer and a Happy Meal!"

We talked about Leif a bit earlier. What do you think about the CANDLEMASS reunion?

I missed it. It was the day after we came home from tour. We had a gig up here in Stockholm. I called him up asking him to put me on the guest list, because you know, there's almost no way I'm going to pay! <laughs> I don't know if I got on the guest list, I was so tired I couldn't go! They started to play at 12pm or something. I heard it was very good. I like CANDLEMASS and everything they've done, even after Messiah left. I like the *From the 13th Sun*, the doomy SABBATH ripoff album, and the album before that [*Dactylis Glomerata*]. I don't like *Chapter VI* too much. I never saw CANDLEMASS with Messiah. I always missed them. I always missed the guitar player. I always wondered what happened to him! It's going to be interesting, of course they're going to get a lot of shit for doing a reunion. I think it's cool.

I want to thank you for taking the time out of your day here...

It's my pleasure, as always.

Any final words you got for this go go round?

Hmm, no. I don't know any final words.

Discography:

With OPETH:

- Orchid* (1995 Candlelight/Century Media)
- Morningrise* (1996 Candlelight/Century Media)
- My Arms Your Hearse* (1998 Candlelight/Century Media)
- Still Life* (1999 Peaceville)
- Blackwater Park* (2001 Music For Nations/Koch)
- With KATATONIA:
- Brave Murder Day* (1996 Avantgarde/Century Media)
- Sounds of Decay* (1997 Avantgarde)
- With BLOODBATH:
- Breeding Death* (2000 Century Media)

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There are interviews, and then there are interviews. Dan Swanö has been one of the most prolific musicians of the past decade, and he loves to talk about music. Two previous interviews have appeared in the pages of LotFP magazine, both being rather extensive. This one was different. There was no current release to hype (although Dan was involved with the latest DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE, released nearly a year ago), yet has future projects in the works (he will be on the upcoming STAR ONE project (masterminded [mastermound?] by Arjen Lucassen). He appeared with NIGHTINGALE, courtesy of LotFP's sponsorship, at ProgPower 2.0 this past November in Atlanta. This was just a music talk. The man's done death metal, prog, avant-garde metal, produced probably a hundred albums. Always more to talk about, and always a unique and striking way of viewing music and its creation. And as usual, before I'd even asked my first question, Dan was off and running about a topic of his own fascination... here he is and here we go:

To be honest, I think Scott Burns was the main force behind Morrisound metal-wise. I don't know, the old guys, Tom and Jim, it doesn't sound that good, to be honest. It sounds like any other big studio trying to do metal. Scott always took something to the essence, created something for the others to start searching for. I always listen to the *Spiritual Healing* stuff and to this day it sounds really really great. It's a real masterpiece. Also with *Leprosy*, it's extremely weird but it's very well produced.

I definitely agree with those two, but I've heard a lot of stuff that came out of there that he did that just sounded like crap.

I read somewhere that the first DEICIDE was done in five days. It was really fast. When you have to do the soundcheck for all the instruments in one day and start recording... That was the way we worked in the old Unisound days. We worked pretty much, *The Somberlain* was done in five days I think. You can hear it if you listen carefully. It's not very well played. They performed the songs the way they were written, but some of the drum takes were below average I think. But this drummer was really weird. No one could tell him if he was good or bad, he was the judge. I can hear that from the *Storm of the Light's Bane* as well. We had a lot of problems patching him up, replacing stuff with samples, and trying to make him sound less out of synch. But we did that, thanks to technology.

There have been things Scott Burns did, I'm thinking of Harmony Corruption by NAPALM DEATH, just sounded horrible.

But they still think it sounds too good. I read about that. There was a bit of a conflict. They forced Scott to make it sound worse. They were so afraid. If you listen to *Scum* and *Enslavement*, and compare that to *Harmony Corruption*, it sounds too good. That was his way of making it lo fi. But there's no way of doing that. Once you have a good sound and you just try to just mess it up, it sounds just badly mixed. If you listen to some of the old records that had a special sound, I mean I spoke to Boss about the early BATHORY recordings. They were serious. They tried to get the best possible sound there was. They rented equipment and they were spending days on that and it still sounds like crap! But it sounds like crap in another way. There is a vision behind the sound. It just came out awful. I can hear from *Harmony Corruption* that someone was "Well, do a bit of this and it sounds worse."

When I talked to NAPALM DEATH, they tell me they were trying to get that Leprosy sound.

They are very far off. If you listen to *Leprosy*, Dan Johnson, the producer, made the drummer play to fit... they are using samples for all the drums. In this way, you pretty much have to play with one arm. You can't play very much funny stuff. Just your basic <makes a simple drum beat sound>. He made him do that so they could use that powerful drum sound. Their playing is very produced. And also for *Spiritual Healing*, it's very produced, very straight forward. Then when bands don't realize they have to go to the bottom of problems to get that kind of production. I've heard horror stories for the AT THE GATES recording. They were spending days and days just doing the drums to get it right. He was not playing anything complex, just straightforward beats, but they were after something. Kind of a groove. You know *Slaughter of the Soul*, it's like a clockwork, something that gets you grooving. I know one guitar player did all of the guitars and the bass. And the drummer Adrian, he was playing solidly for I think more than a week, and all of a sudden they were like "Yeah, that's the one!" and he went "OK." Then they just kept going, you know? There's something about being fluent, in a way, to keep the groove going. Once you get that, that's when you get the albums with the really great impact. Once you clean the act up a bit.

The other Morrisound recording Burns did that I wonder if it could be done better is the CYNIC album.

I've heard that on the radio, once. I remember that it sounded pretty much like the *Human* album in a way, but even more complex. You could hear them playing, especially the drummer. I remember flipping on the radio and going whoa, this was really weird for being on Swedish radio. It was some rock show and they were playing CYNIC and it was nothing for me. I don't care for that kind of music at all. After awhile you get really formula. You do the same thing day in and day out. That's what made me kill Unisound. I didn't have the drive to take me to the next level. There's nothing in me to make me go to the bank and get that big loan and get that console, get that big fancy place. There was no drive in me, nothing to kick my butt to do things better. I've come to a level which was far beyond what I expected. It

was really no dream of mine to have a professional studio and get the sound right. I always wanted to work with the music with the bands. I realized there was not enough time to get involved in the songwriting. That's when you can do the real good work, in the songwriting. It's not in getting the right guitar sound or snare sound. That's good, but you can never save a boring track with an excellent production. Well, nu metal obviously does all the time. Just trying to find the right songs for the right band and then get them the right sound to match the songs, that's when you have it dead on. That's one of the things that happened with the Black album from METALLICA. Not many people realize how important Bob Rock was for that one. I know now, from working with MEMORY GARDEN, that a real producer hanging around in the rehearsal room, being the fifth or the sixth member or whatever of the band, during the whole production, from when the first riff is written to the last mastering second is done, maybe even to the packaging, that's really important to keep telling the bands what to do and what not to do and being that member of the audience with the overall listening quality that "That's far too complex. We don't like this, you should play that way, how you play it in that song." The more you know about the band you're producing, the more you can tell them in their own language that they should try this sound from that song on this one. It's really really important for the production of an album to get the best tracks together. Then it works automatically. You get a good crunchy sound if you have a good crunchy song. It's weird, the way it works. I'm really trying to get into production more with the bands I'm asked to record. I say "I can help you out with the material, and the rest will sort out itself." You can go to another studio and the songs will be so prepared to be recorded that there must be a deaf person to soundcheck if you don't get a good sound out of these songs, you know what I mean? I recorded so many albums where the band's playing on top of themselves. You don't get a second chance to hear what the fuck is going on because they haven't listened to each other. They all played parts that they felt was inspiring but they didn't work together. As a unit. That's a shame, really. When bands do that, they smash! When they back up and polish things up a little bit, they break.

How many bands did you get the chance to do that with in the Unisound days?

Not many. Far too many bands just came in and did their thing. To be honest, that's one of the things that made me a bit sad after awhile. In the beginning, I remember GODGORY and KATATONIA being classic examples, there was something in me that just told me to nourish these bands through that first difficult demo and just work overtime like hell to make it the best possible. You really don't think too much, it's like an instinct. There is something right now covering the big picture that is going to make it going directly beyond the chances of it getting signed to a record label. With KATATONIA, there were some parts in some of the songs where I told them "Don't do that to yourself. Be a slow band. Be a doom band. Take out the fast parts, and make it slow. Try to be professional." The drumming was not good enough, even for the slow parts on the very first demo. I tried to make them sound as professional as possible and that meant taking away all of the fast parts. They were like "Oh, do you think so? OK." They just did it because I told them to. They would never have had the deal with No Fashion if they'd kept these fast parts, I can tell you. It has nothing to do with me or anything, you would have thought so too. It sounded horrible. It just didn't fit the song. They put it in there because they wanted a fast part. It was the same with GODGORY. It was more of a production thing. I really tried to get them the most powerful sound possible for a demo recording. Once you get a demo tape on a cassette, you're always expecting some really horrible stuff, especially in those days. Nothing with a good production came on cassette. It sounds ten times better than the albums they did. That demo sounded massive! Big fucking drums and crunchy guitars and the lead guitarist was amazing, like total Petrucci kind of playing. It was perfect! It got them signed to Invasion Records. Some of the bands obviously, if I just told them,

they would listen, then I thought "Then maybe I'd have to start rearranging the songs, and it will take more time and I will not come home at six, and..." It was like, what the hell am I thinking? It's just not right. But they are not hiring me as a producer, they are hiring me as someone to record their album. But I will have a problem getting a good sound because the songs are not good, you know? It links, in a way. After awhile I realize if I don't get one month extra to get into the songwriting and pre-production and all that, then it's not going to be a good album. Then I tried with MILLENCOLIN, a Swedish kind of pop hardcore band, I was heavily involved with all their albums. They did one called *Four Monkeys*, which I did a total pre-production. They came to the studio and we had one month, which was a really long time for me. I usually had like two weeks, tops, for the bands. We got all of the material they had, and started to record it. As soon as we felt a song was not happening, we stripped it down to one guitar and vocals. All of a sudden we realize "There are no vocal harmonies." They have written a song and the vocals were changing every time he was singing it. "What are you doing?" It was like a theater where you're constantly changing the lines. There's nothing, you don't have a song, just a bunch of riffs, and it sounds like another of your songs. The vocals were the most important thing. Then we adapted the chords to that one, that was pretty much taken from the old version, and rebuilt the song from there. We made one of the better songs called 22, from a boring hardcore track to a really powerful one with a lot of key changes, a lot of mood changes, it turned out to be a single. That song would not have even fir the B side of an EP if I wouldn't have touched it. The problem is, even with a month, two weeks of pre-production, you get tired mentally after three songs, of having to totally rebuild them. It's too much. Too much for me, and for the band. It's like building a house, but not properly, so you take it down brick by brick and build it one more time even more carefully. You can't cope with that! So it was like "Oh shit", so after three songs of being into every tiny detail, we thought "We'll leave it and just go on and record the album." We had enough strong tracks. There were some songs we just left out of this big attention thing. They just slipped through the system. You need a lot of time, years are not enough sometimes to be honest, which is why some bands leave a three or four year break for every album. If you want to top the one before, you have to find the inspiration. You have to find the inspiration, and make pre-productions, and make sure each song is the best possible track. Right now I'm busy doing this MEMORY GARDEN, and it's turning out fabulous because we have this very slow tempo, but every time we're all together, something really really good happens. The songs are constantly growing in the way that I want them to. The cool thing is, I'm also growing as a producer when they're growing as a band. What I felt was the right thing to do at rehearsal, and I felt "This is great!", and I pick it up out of the blue two weeks later on a Sunday morning, and it's like "This needs an edit." And I go into my computer and just cut out parts. Throw around choruses and move them around and add things and then say "This is the version!" Take it back to the rehearsal room and they say "This is a lot better than the other one." And they rehearse this new version and will record this new version. Then we add vocals to it, and I realize that the vocal harmonies we were discussing are not good enough. If we rewrite this section, the vocals will... It's like a big puzzle. Now I think next weekend we're doing a three song promo recording at a local studio here. We will record three songs in the versions that are really demoed. We've tried many versions and many takes and we've really listened to them and analyzed them. And three songs, it's like "Yeah, this is the one, this is better than any other song on any other record." If we'd have stuck with the first versions of each of these songs, they would not have been better. It's the details that make it. The tempo, the beat. Maybe this song should not have seven string guitars, maybe we should stick with their old tuning, or whatever. You don't have the time to take care of these details in two weeks, three weeks, or a month. That is the biggest problem. You don't have the time. I

would love to work with KATATONIA, or OPETH, or maybe new DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE. To top the stuff, you need so much time and some bands just don't have the patience. Maybe because they don't analyze their own material. They just go with the flow and they're just lucky enough times to have a career out of it. But when they run out of good ideas, and they don't start analyzing their own ideas, then they're over. There are a really a lot of bands out there releasing albums that are totally uninteresting. And it's world class artists. They don't seem to listen to themselves. They don't compare themselves with their own past. They just go on making albums. It's really boring.

What has your opinion been of the MEMORY GARDEN material already released?

The *Mirage* album is excellent. It's that year's best album metal-wise. I listened to it at work constantly for like five, six hours just a few days ago. Kept it going on repeat. It's very well produced. I have a few problems with the vocal harmonies not being adapted to the riffs. One riff, one vocal harmony, let's play them together, and it's nothing for me. Here's a vocal harmony, let's write a riff that works together with the vocal harmony, that enhances it right behind it. They don't think this way. "Yeah, we've written a new song!" OK. Are there any vocals? "No!" OK. So now we are starting to speak each other's language. "It's a cool riff, it's a doom, it's a slow song!" Alright, what's the vocal harmonies like? "We don't have any." You don't have a song, sorry! You have backing tracks. But to them, that's all there is. They started building something, but they're way off. Just adding vocals to that excellent backing track, if it's not good vocals, it just totally destroys the whole song. My main job here is to be the vocal police and make sure these guys know the power of vocals. I don't know how many albums you've heard, it's really good until the vocals come in and it's like "Oops. Next one!" It happens to me all the time! I haven't been impressed many times in the past four or five years. If there's a really powerful vocal involved, that's when it really sticks. I'm trying to work a lot with the vocalist from MEMORY GARDEN to make sure his voice... In some ranges, it's not good. He has ranges where he is totally lethal, he's excellent, and I try to keep him in that range pretty much all the time. When he's not in that range, I try to add harmony vocals which are in that range to polish up the other harmony which is not sounding too good in that range. I'm just trying to hide all the flaws and make it the best possible album. That's also a production-soundwise thing. The vocals will have a better sound to us as humans if it's in the right range of the vocalist. It doesn't sound like "Oh, he's not supposed to sing that low." If you're singing that low, but add a good harmony to it in his best range, it will even out things. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of hard work. And so far, we don't have any lyrics. He's doing all this phony stuff, singing whatever. And it's an added dimension with a really good lyric.

The first thing that everyone thinks of when they hear MEMORY GARDEN, is CANDLEMASS. In addition to wondering "Is this song as good as it can be?" by itself, how is it having *Nightfall* and *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus* looking down at you, especially since the old CANDLEMASS seems to be back?

I don't know really. One day they're cursing the CANDLEMASS thing. "Oh, we're so tired of CANDLEMASS." And the next day they're playing live doing CANDLEMASS tracks with Messiah on vocals. I'm like "Hello, you're asking for it!" They have other connections. The guitarist Simon [Johansson] used to play with ABSTRAKT ALGEBRA with Leif from CANDLEMASS and there's all kinds of connections and Mike Wead played on *Nightfall*, blah blah. And this one new song they've written the guitars for, as I call it, is a total CANDLEMASS song. As long as they are not quitting writing CANDLEMASS songs, they will have this thing all over them. To be honest, I don't have a single note on *Mirage* that is CANDLEMASS. They had totally gone away from that. A lot of stuff on *Forever* is a lot of CANDLEMASS, especially some vocal areas are very similar to how Messiah sings. It's also that the vocals and the guitar riffs don't really match all of the

time. That's a typical CANDLEMASS feature. He's just singing on top of riffs that are impossible to sing correct harmonics on top of. Once you start tidying up and make sure the guitars and the vocals match, that's when CANDLEMASS starts to go away. There's no signs of any CANDLEMASS in any of the songs I'm producing. I want MEMORY GARDEN. No other band. I think they have a style all their own which is strong enough. I try to incorporate all of their other influences. These guys have a really weird music taste. These guys go places! I went to rehearsal, and one of them is like "I was listening to the new Don Henley." Hello? What's happening? That's like country music! They are all totally PSYCHOTIC WALTZ fans. Into weird shit. I don't know why they play that kind of music because some of them are into really brutal stuff. IN FLAMES and something like that. When you hang out with them and party and stuff, there's nothing like CANDLEMASS music playing.

Have you heard the FIFTH REASON album?

Yeah.

I'm not sure if I like the last FIFTH REASON album or the last MEMORY GARDEN album better, but the FIFTH REASON definitely has a lot more creative things going on.

Of course. It's a playground I think. Just trying every possible style. I think it's a good thing and a bad thing. It doesn't really give them a FIFTH REASON sound. It's pretty much the EDGE OF SANITY syndrome, trying to be too many bands at the same time. We only did that because we had nothing only EDGE OF SANITY that was worth a career. It lasted one album to me, *Unorthodox*. That's when the EDGE OF SANITY sound ran out of ideas. We had Jesus Cries and a few songs that were classic *Unorthodox* sound, then we had Eley and Silent. A few songs for every sessions. But trying to get ten songs out of the well that created *Unorthodox* was impossible. I think they suffer from the same thing. They don't have this special thing going. I think MEMORY GARDEN has this. I think they have something pretty unique. They've blended so well, they can easily write similar songs and it's still entertaining for 45 minutes. Some bands just don't have that backbone. They say that "OK, this song sounds just like this other song we wrote. Shit!" For me, that's like "Hooray! We made two songs that have the same flavor, and it's my flavor!" I'm petty proud that I can tune my guitar and a special way and play any chord and that's NIGHTINGALE. There's nothing else in the world that sounds like it. It's my shit! That's pretty fantastic I think. I've done a few good things in that sense. Keep a certain style going, a certain mood. I haven't listened enough to FIFTH REASON, there were some production flaws, it was impossible for me to listen to it a bunch of times.

It must be worse for you because you know exactly why something came out sounding the way it did.

It's more like "Ah, shit! If they had a better this or that, it would have sounded so much better! I would have liked it even more! Fuck!" It's often that kind of stuff that irritates the hell out of me. Fortunately a lot of the stuff coming out today has a tremendous production. That's one thing we can thank nu metal for. People have realized the power of a really good production. I have a lot of customers in the shop and they keep asking me "What kind of stuff do these bands use?" They use a lot of money. They go to the best studio possible and get the oldest baddest engineers possible and just record the way they always have. The songs have the energy. There's no thing called energy you can press a button on. You have to have it in your songs. Buy the best guitar, and the best amp, and you still have to learn to play. It's all in the production of the whole band. I think the bands that have the most success are the ones working like a company. They have to back off and listen to themselves. Realize that if this guy is not doing his job, kick him out and bring in a better one. I hate this way of thinking, but I realize now that's the only way to get high quality shit and to stand out. If you want to live from your music, you have to see it as some sort of job. I hate that! I don't want to do that! It kills all kinds of creativity. If you're a big band and making money and if your music is normally a five on a scale of ten, you can go to maybe three or six before

you start freaking out like "Oh no, it's not going to work," then you go back to your safe middle thing where you always do all your stuff. If you're an independent, you can go one or you can go ten, and if people hate it you can go "Well I hate it too, fuck off!" and just go on with your life. But you can never get away from such a failure as *Cold Lake*, you know? You can't get away from that, it's impossible! But if you're an independent, people will forgive you because it's not that many people that had a financial thing involved in that mishap. It's well, shit, it's really really weird.

With production issues how you're talking about it, it makes sense to me. Take the time, refine the material, don't just settle for whatever. But then again, the entire underground metal industry is just cranking out the stuff, bang bang bang bang. And so much of it just isn't very good. You've worked with albums that have done nothing, and you've worked with albums that have sold a hell of a lot. Does taking the time and putting the work in end up paying off for the album more times than not?

I've always had the worst production for the most successful albums. It's some psychological problem. As soon as there's so much money and so much time, I don't know anything. I just listen to the first mix of *Storm of the Light's Bane* the other day and just cried. It's the most horrible sounding piece of shit I've ever heard. How could I do that? In between two really good sounding albums, I did that one, and it sounds like shit. There must have been something about the pressure on that one. On the one to ten scale, I was a five all the time. I was afraid of doing anything out of the ordinary. And I was always doing weird shit! I guess I had too much respect for the situation with Nuclear Blast and the band came back and they were more confident, more of a rock star attitude than the other time around. They were behaving more like "We're on a label, we have a lot of money, you should be happy that we came back to you!" That kind of attitude. The songs were not that very ready, and I was not happy with the fact that they were not paying attention. The playing was not good enough. The only guy in charge of the band, this Jon guy, he was not really there. He was in the room, but he was really childish, hanging out with other people, saying "Well that's good enough, blah blah, just keep it going! We want to go out and have a beer!" If we could be a bit more serious please? That's something that's always happened. And then I've spent years working on albums of my own and they didn't sell 10% of what *Storm of the Light's Bane* sold but I think they're a lot better. There are some immortal tracks on *Storm of the Light's Bane*, but some of the tracks that are really fast are really boring. I don't like the way DISSECTION plays fast. I think they should do more Night's Blood kind of style. When they go off being Norwegian, I don't think it sounds that good. I've done other black metal albums that sounds ten times better. That's my fault, but they knew how to play that kind of fast music a lot better, and it sounded a lot more professional. They lacked something, that little spark to make it shine. With your question, I understand what the question is and it's sad that's the way it is. Sometimes it's also a packaging thing. They have a lot more money to spend putting the right track on the right compilation with the right magazine that reaches out to one hell of a lot of people. There's a really big metal market. The average kid who's buying Metal Hammer and listening to metal radio and watching MTV2 with only the cool songs, once you get into that circle you sell a shitload of albums, you know? It doesn't really mean that you have to be good. It scares the hell out of me. It's another one of the reasons why I quit recording. I couldn't deal with that fact. My view on life is that everyone should have a break, but people with more money have more breaks. It's really bad.

I can understand on a labels' point of view looking at the dollars and cents. If they put a band in a studio for a month instead of two weeks, it's going to cost twice the amount, but is it going to make that much more money back?

If it's so bad that the band is so out of shape that I will need to do this, it's not going to do with two weeks. It's hard to fix something that is broken really badly.

Sometimes, it's just like "Guys, sorry, just write new songs. See you in a year." I wanted to say that so many times. But you can't do that. If there's nothing to rebuild, if there's nothing to work with, it's all lacking, there's nothing good. A lot of bands I've worked with, they haven't lived that long after that recording. There was something not clicking in the band and they were just fulfilling a contract. I could feel that. "Well, what the fuck, let's just do this album and get it over with."

Were there any bands that you tried to make song changes with that really resented it?

Not really, to be honest. I tried to not interfere with bands. If you have a vision, I respect that vision very much, but if you ask for my point of view in a way... if we're in the middle of something and this big smile asks you "How was it, was it any good?" you don't say "No, that was really bad, you should play this chord." You don't do that. It's not good for the situation. That's a sweet little lie. If the band is like "Oh shit, there's something wrong here with this part." That's when I say you could do this or do that and give them a lot of options. Most of the time it was just if you don't play double bass drums so fast because your drummer can't even play half the speed, maybe it will sound better. Then you try it without the [makes ridiculously fast double bass drum sound] business, it's like "Wow, this sounds professional!" Maybe they should start listening to themselves at rehearsals. I had bands, I don't want to mention any names, spending one and a half days on one song because once they got to this one passage, the drummer just flipped. I was leaving the studio. "Well you guys know what to do. Once you get this one nailed, call me! I'll be home waiting." And they never called! Was the phone line working here? I left there at one o'clock and went back at ten in the evening and said "I'm going to bed now, what's happening?" "Oh, we're still trying." [makes ridiculously fast double bass drum sounds again] "Oh, fuck!" All of a sudden, in the middle of the night for this guy at like 4am, it just clicked. He just nailed it and they were so happy. I was like "We're way behind schedule here..." That's when a band is ready to experiment a bit. Maybe they should try to cut out some of these parts in the other songs if you don't want to call your label and say "We can record the next part of the album next year," because that's when the studio is vacant again. I never forced a band, that's the wrong way to say it, but the situation forced the band to start cooperating with studio technology. That's when they realize this is working under a microscope. Every little note, every detail, will be heard. That thing that can be what separates you from the big guys. If the opening minutes of the album contains something a bit out of timing, out of tune, just something that doesn't feel right, the chances are not very high that this guy, holding four albums in his hand listening to all four and wanting to buy one, is going to buy your album. But if you knock this kid out in the first very first important minute, chances are he will buy your album. Then they will buy more albums and he will tell his friends and then the whole thing starts going. If you look at the albums that have sold a lot that I've been involved with, there's been these killer beginnings on these albums. Always been something massive about them. The first minute is so goddamn important. Sometimes they destroy the whole thing with an intro that never ends. You want to get blown away. When you listen to a CD, you want to just fly away, escape reality. If it's quality enough, you get that kick, I think it's better than any other drug, just to listen to listen to the best possible album in headphones. Be out there for 45 minutes. That's my cure. I try my very hardest to make these kinds of albums for other people. I know there's a handful of people out there in this big world that seem to have this connection to my material. That's enough for me. If it's only ten people in the whole wide world that can listen to *Moomtower* or some of the other albums that I've made, and you see they will spend 45 minutes straight without mobile phones, without anyone interrupting in the dark with their headphones, just listen solidly, that's the only paycheck I ever needed. And I wish more bands thought that way. They don't seem to do that. They keep breaking the spell all the time with details that aren't supposed to be there in

a professional package. I guess I just have this big overall vision. I'm very picky when it comes to music. But when I love something, I love it so much. My latest discovery is this band I never really bothered to listen to called GIANT. I guess they were pretty big in America. There's just something about GIANT. "Oh, that's the old Christina crap," you know? And then I realized this was the most professional AOR music I've heard in my entire life. I'm a sucker for that kind of style. I want it professional. I want it from people who can easily play the most complex stuff. They play this kind of music from the heart, and with a little bit of... I don't know how to say it, but it's not 100% dead serious. It's like 98. They can sing stuff like "Yeah baby!" all night long but they mean it so bad in that very special way that I want them. It's entertainment in the best sense. The guitar player is the best. The production is far out, it's extremely good for being 89 or whatever. And the vocals are everything I've wanted in an AOR band, and I've been searching everywhere. I've always felt "This is the best I've found this far, if it wasn't for the drummer, that would be it!" In this band, they made two albums in the beginning of the 90s, and there's not a bad second on them. It's just like these albums have been out there all the time, and by accident, I hear it. And they floor me. I haven't been listened to anything else. It's embarrassing. I'm a total Giantholic. People at work are killing me. "If you play that album one more time I'll kick you in the face!" I don't care, and off we go one more time! I went to see Arjen [Lucassen] to do this vocal thing, I brought fourteen CDs with me or something, and all I listened to the same GIANT CD on the whole flight there and the whole flight back. Just on repeat, I couldn't stop listening. It's healing! So goddamn professional in every sense. That's the kind of stuff I try to make. As soon as there are other people involved that don't have that detail to attention, that's when I have to start doing my magic in the computer trying to fix them up to get my personal feeling. The difference can be a few milliseconds, but that's when the groove kicks in, when we people start moving. It's magic, that groovy thing that separates two bands. There's something about AC/DC that seems to make people go mad and they've been able to get away with sounding the same for twenty years. That's the groove they have. It's the guitars and the drums. You know, a band like AC/DC wouldn't get signed today. But there's something, and I'm way behind subject here, but the biggest thing there is to make the best possible album. Someone's going to pick my albums up in a second hand shop in 20 years and it's going to kick their ass, you know? Just like I found GIANT or KANSAS albums. It's art to me, it should live forever! I hope everyone thinks that. Some of the CDs my wife gets for review, it's like they don't even care to listen to it. It's obviously crap! It's like what the fuck were they thinking? Can the label really like that piece of shit? It's like only bad songs. Boring. It upsets me, and they spend a lot of money on that.

And they'll spend a lot of money telling you they're the best thing ever.

That's what happened with GIANT. I found out she got a whole bunch of stuff from Now and Then and Frontiers. "Oh, this is the old DANGER DANGER singer!" I'm a sucker for their first album, that old, cheesy shit. And oh my god, this is not good! It's like a home demo, with out of tune vocals, eww, take it away! It lasted twenty seconds. "Yeah baby driving down the avenue, I love you." It was crap. I put in some other stuff, "Ew, what is this, some Italian-forgot-to-write-songs metal stuff?" Then I put in GIANT, and then that was interesting. The intro just grabbed my attention. It's a sound that I could use. The way the lead guitar is played on top of a specific keyboard sound is exactly the way I do the NIGHTINGALE stuff when I want to enhance a melody. The guitar and keyboard playing exactly the same thing. It's a technique often used by RUSH and QUEENSRYCHE and people like that to really put something out, to really see and hear it. Then the song starts. This is the basic stuff, this is GIANT. Then there's a change of key in the music that is so clever, how the fuck can he go from this to this? And it sounds good. I

couldn't in my wildest dreams have written a verse in one key and change to another key for the bridge. It just doesn't exist! And he pulls it off. Whoa, this is cool. Now hit me with the chorus here, and the chorus comes in and it's like "These chords, and now he's going to play that chord," and he doesn't! He plays a chord that doesn't exist! The weirdest twist ever! I remember the goosebumps were to the roof! It's like a normal AOR song, all these things happening after all these disappointments. And so this is GIANT. I'm running to the computer and out to the internet trying to find something and all I could find was giant dicks and giant whatever and fuck, I want to know more about GIANT! These guys rock! And I listened to this mini album on and on, and it had live songs from the other albums. I started calling all my friends, "Do you have any GIANT albums?" "No, no, I sold them in 92." Oh man! I went through the second hand shops, I was going crazy! I found one track on the internet. That was all I found, some See You In My Dreams hit song in America. Finally I got all the albums, and it's really really good shit. If someone is into high quality good music, the guitar player, I'm telling you one Mr. Petrucci must have listened to this guy quite a lot. Because Mr. Dan Huff, he produced two albums from MEGADETH, *Risk* and the one before that...

Ah. Well.

Not good albums for MEGADETH, he could not save that band. I only listened to them because he did them. He's got something, I don't know what it is, he has the whole picture. Dan Huff knows exactly what people want, and he knows how to do it in an extremely professional way. Just like I know what people want in a certain kind of metal. I still don't know what people like in my 'real' music, my symphonic rock UNICORN stuff. I still have a lot to learn, a lot of surprises coming up. I know metal so well because I come from another standpoint. I see metal as a whole genre. I see the whole thing, I'm not in it, I'm outside looking in. It's very easy to write that kind of music because I have it in my backbone, in my blood, but I've left it and I'm taking a few visits back there and I only want to bring out the goodies. I don't want anything else to do with that. But with symphonic rock, I'm still searching for my sound. I'm trying to find something unique within this big genre, and that's what keeps me going. I've pretty much found my style with any other project I've made, and I think I could record new songs from any of my projects and play it to you and you could nail it down in ten seconds, "Ah, that's PAN-THE-MONIUM, that's ODYSSEY, that's a new song from the *Moontower* stuff." But for the symphonic rock stuff, I'm still trying to find an identity and it's taking a lot of time. I'm not giving up. But that's a real tough task. But it will happen.

I was actually listening to *Emotional Wasteland* before I called you. I was thinking that same kind of thing. When you do your metal stuff, you've got your mark, You have things that are never going to be reproduced there, and the songs are good, but the overall sound is not it's own island in the big ocean of prog rock bands. That's true. The problem was, we could never get that focus. The guitar player was never into the same sound as me. UNICORN for me back in the demo days, we had a special sound going which was pretty unique. That was part of the recording quality, to be honest. We were sounding a special way because the production was not really good. It made us a sound we believed we had, but once we started recording the same songs with professional equipment, the vibe and the originality of the track disappeared. We were having more of a brutal approach to this kind of music we had. I was striking the drums harder, the tempo was higher, there was more distortion to the guitars, more power, but the same kind of songs. Once we started to record with each instrument separately, we just took out all the balls and it turned cheesy. I still have a problem listening to a lot of these album tracks. I'd rather listen to the demos. I have the songs in my head, the way I wanted them to be when we recorded them. I still have a vision of certain songs, but once you get an idea it's like painting a picture. "It's too yellow, shit! I will keep it for future reference how not to

do it." And just hang it on the wall. That's the albums. I think there are a few exceptions. One of the songs I'm totally happy with is *At the End of the Bridge*. That's one I can play to anyone, and I'm proud of this. The other songs either have something with production, or the way we played it, it wasn't finished. *At the End of the Bridge* was a very special song. I wrote it when I was moving from my old town to this one. It was a love song to my childhood and the area I knew of. I was just moving away to a town that I visited two times. And I'm just going to leave everything, pack it up, and go. I've not been through big changes very much in my life. I'm writing the best kind of symphonic rock material when I really have something to say. I'm trying to write only when I'm inspired which is why it takes so long for me to get something together these days. I want the songs to come pouring out of my ears before I start recording them. I want them to force me to record them. A lot of these bands around me in this genre, they seem to force themselves to write. I think it should be the other way around. You have so many songs writing inside of you that you have to record them. That takes a lot of time, but that also takes a lot of quality. It's going to be a very commercial recording for a metalhead, but it's not going to be GIANT music. I'm not going to scare you. It's not going to be anywhere near as poppy as some of the DREAM THEATER stuff. It's going to be mellow, good quality soft prog rock music, but I want it to be so damned good that it has the same power as some of the UNICORN stuff. I get emails, and regular mail, that says things like "What the fuck, I've never listened to anything softer than thrash metal, but UNICORN kicks ass!" I saw the discussion on the Ultimate Metal thing, I saw that favorite bands, a lot of them had Unicorn as number one. I was really freaking out. What I'm trying to do now, is make sure that the heritage of UNICORN from the material that's been spread, would be there on that album, and it's going to be so much better and so much more professional that people are just going to freak out. It's going to take me a lot of time because that's fucking hard work. It means that I will have to do most of it totally by myself and wait for the divine inspiration to come because that's when I write this music the best. I can write metal, I can sit down and write a metal album right now, no problem. It would not be the best, but it would be better than some of the crap that I hear. It would be pretty uninspired and by the book. Basic metal, you know? But I want to write something that is above average, always. To stick out of the bunch of albums. I guess a lot of people in the same situation as my wife, they get ten albums, and then "Oh shit, I have to review albums tonight." Maybe you? <laughs> And I put some in the CD player, and I want them to make me stop and say "Wait a minute. This rocks! I have to start writing the review." I feel it all the time, I'm in the bed thinking and my wife is listening and when I'm listening and thinking it's pretty good, she's like <makes typewriter noises>, the reviews are just coming out. We're registering here, it's quality. And there are some other ones, "I don't know what to write about this, it's nothing. It tells me nothing." And I have to say "I can't help you here because it doesn't say anything to me or any other music listener." It's just blank. A big question mark, like "Hello?" But people have to be patient. I realize there's one thing you can't buy, and that's inspiration. You can try hard to be inspired. I always try to do this re-recording. Getting to my working room here, I just try to write a song, I've grown enough that it doesn't work. Let's re-record a UNICORN song! So I'm so inspired by this re-recording process since it sounds so much better than the original. It's like "Shit! I'm all inspired!" Then in the middle I start playing and think "I can build a whole new song from that." And I start doing that. You have to learn how to be inspired. It's a very important part of the progress.

What you're saying about it being professional and that all of the little details are important. I agree with you on that. But it seems like a lot of the metal bands, and that's what I'm still with..

You're a metal head. I was always a wuss.

Looking at the list of bands you've worked with, a lot of them were the most underground style of metal. Some of them I'd definitely say are just crap.

Yep.

You've got that "This must be professional," if you have a band with an uncommercial attitude, what the hell happens there?

It's a collision, and I have a few memories that are not very good. Imagine you had to write about flowers, and you had to do it solidly for two weeks with a lot of research involved. It's like "OK, here we go!" A lot of these bands came in with such an impossible task. "We got ten days, we're going to record 14 songs for the album, two for this, three for the tribute albums." That's 19 songs in 10 days. "That's OK?" Oh man, you just have to get them working as fast as possible. Try to record as many as possible at the same time and let them play and let them produce themselves. Let them judge. "Are you happy with this sound?" They say, "Yeah, it's great!" I know that it's not good, but then they know they have been in charge. They can't blame me, you know? Once you get too many of that kind of band, it kills you. That's the anti-what I want to do. I've done my share of crap. There're so many bad albums out there. When we were moving to this new apartment, I was cleaning out the locker that has all the productions that I have done. It's not every time that I've received the CDs. I used to get them all the time from Invasion Records and stuff like that. I will just put all the albums that I have recorded on the table here, and I will put all the other CDs in the closet here. And I remember just preventing it from tipping over when it's like 60 albums! "Holy smoke! I did this?" Then I started listening to them. Oh, this band from Germany with Norwegian lyrics and corpsepaint named after a CARCASS track playing a NIRVANA 2002 cover. Oh, that's SPINAL TAP! I did this, you know? I even sing on it, I play keyboards. There's another German band that just came to the studio and said "Our guitar player just quit, can you play all the guitars?" Alright. That's one of the weirdest things. The drum machine was so badly programmed, it sounds like five year olds had done it, and they insisted "No, that's good, we like it this way."

Who was that?

Off the record, you can't print it. I won't do that because they were so nice. I was ill and they were buying me chocolate. They were called <x>.

Who was the German band singing in Norwegian?

FERMENTING INNARDS. They were funny. They had this guy in a Norwegian band translating the lyrics into Norwegian. They came from Germany and sang in Norwegian and it's so weird shit, they didn't know shit but they were singing. The translation was so weird. I don't know. There's a lot of weird things that I've done. When I look through them all, I've done so many ripoff albums. I've done my albums like INFESTDEAD. But that's fun. That's entertainment. I just have a lot of them here, we have stuff like UNCANNY, I did COERCION, GOLLUM [Golem?], I did GHOSTORM, 9 TIMES THE PAIN, just so much stuff. And all these memories come back. I did OVERFLESH [?], one more GHOSTORM, UNCURBED, I did NOVEMBRE, I did ANCIENT, it's never ending. I did a lot of recording for the first WAR compilation. I did DISSECTION, KATATONIA, and some other bands. They just popped by and I recorded them.

I've got the list I've compiled so far...

I was looking for this fanzine that had a list I had on my very first webpage five years ago. I was so glad I had a PC that I could cut, copy, and paste. He just said "Could you list the albums you've done?" That's when it flipped. "Yeah, I can do this now!" I did this intensive research, I called everyone, I searched for all the calendars and I gave him the biggest list in the history of mankind. Every demo, everything, up to 1996. You put it in this email and it was 15kb, really big for an email. He just printed it, the whole list, in this little A5 small fanzine. It was like nine pages. It was fucking hilarious.

The list I've compiled has 77 albums so far, and I'm imagining that I only have half of them.

It depends what counts. I've done a lot of stuff.

I'm counting things like when you did the THERION stuff, it appeared on two CDs so I'm counting it as two different entries.

If you want to do it that way, it's nice. If you want to count every time I did something on an album, the list is going to be very long. Stuff that I recorded, that I was in charge of the mixdown, will take the list down a little bit. I've also done a lot of session work. I played piano on Bombshell Rocks, for example. I've seen a lot of albums where I just did backing whatever. It's pretty cool. You don't know how many spinoffs are going to be on this AYREON related project.

The question about the recording and stuff, what bands did you not have the chance to really dig in and work on songs with that you really wanted to. Not because they needed it so much that their stuff was really interesting and you wanted to bring out the best in them.

OPETH and KATATONIA, and that offer still stands. I was so close before KATATONIA reunited around the *Brave Murder* period. The original idea was me and Anders writing the KATATONIA album because he was still not friends with Jonas back then. I was so into it, we had this great vision of what it should sound like. And all of a sudden they get back together, and feeling each other again, it was cozy, one guy in this corner and this guy in that corner, and they just made music that both of them like. They made this *Brave Murder Day* which was totally the opposite of what I had in mind. I was very disappointed at first, then they got Mike to sing on it and it got very brutal and very Hitchcock. I was fucked! We could have done such a blast! If we had materialized what we had talked about, it would have been a classic. But that never happened. I would have enjoyed working with Mike for OPETH related kind of music. We have so much in common and we have never written anything together. I don't care what people say, I still have not done anything on any OPETH album I recorded. Fuck no, I haven't done anything. There's not a nanosecond of me on any OPETH album. I would have loved to do something in that genre. I would like to co-write OPETH songs. I don't mean I want to produce them, I think [Nordstrom] is doing a good job there. I just want to try to morph my way of thinking with their way of thinking. I'm not going to slag them off, but there's some magic lost compared to what I hear in *Orchid*. I think that's the magic of having rehearsed. They were around for at least three or four years with the same material before the *Orchid* sessions. There are some songs on [*Morningrise*] which are very old too, I think Black Rose Immortal. It's a bit like wine. You put it away for a long long time. There's no way to really emulate what happens with the aging. You grow as a musician, you grow as a person in this time. I'm working on a track for the next NIGHTINGALE called Shadow Man. I wrote this track more than a year ago. I remember trying to write the lyrics for it on a trip to Abyss Studio last December. I had just recorded the first demo version and sent it out to the other members. It's a good one, and we rehearsed it a little bit. Then I came home and realized there was something missing here. I re-recorded another version of it. I started to patch things up. More keyboards, try this and try that. I didn't get the gut feeling that this was the opening track for the next Nightingale, that this was going to kick people, you know? I just never felt that. I just picked it up a few weeks ago, a year after I did the first demo, One year! A lot of time for one song to grow. And it was clear, all the mistakes that made me not get the gut feeling. I just knew that, there they are! Cut this out, do this, and I got freaked out! I nailed the motherfucking song! It was just a few details. I know that every fan of my music is going to have that song in their top ten song ever list. The difference was, they would not have had that in the first version. There would have been something that was not magic. It's an excellent track. It's everything I want in a song. But I was not mature enough, I was not a good enough songwriter one year ago to realize. It's the same building stones. I didn't rewrite the song. Same verse, same bridge, same chorus. Even the same phony lyrics. I just executed the arrangement a lot more professionally and a lot more the way I like it when I hear

it. And suddenly I knew how to like it even more. So now when I go back to the other demos I made, I hear that something is still not giving me that... I just leave them. One day I'll listen to them and know what's wrong. And I will fix it, then it will be a killer song. That's the process of again. But you're not allowed to do that when you're signed and you're touring and have one month off. Then you have to write the song, and then you have to be in the studio. And you're physically totally out of it. The whole Atlanta trip, I was out for a lot of days after coming home, because that was such a big event for us because everything was "Oh, this is boring" afterwards. And we have been really together, then separate like "Bye bye, see you some other time." When I came back from that, it was hard. Every time was the wrong time to try to get the Nightingale thing. I was eating and breathing NIGHTINGALE for such a long time before that show. I can only imagine what it would be like to be on tour and having three months of people telling you you're the best in the world, and come home to silence and you have to write a better album than the one you've just been out touring for. That must be hell, and knowing I have only a full month. Some bands pull it off. EVERGREY, they keep saying they write their album in a month, and I think Masterplan is one of the better songs recorded by a Swedish band of all time! Then the album is good, it's far above average, but never reaches up to the same standard as Masterplan. That's a 10, and the other songs are between six and seven. Normal boring music is around four or five. It's not giving me goosebumps. The Masterplan is put on repeat 40 times and I don't care.

What did you think of their previous album?

I didn't care too much for that one, actually.

Really?

I remember this <in a shrill voice> Nosferatu! That's all I remember. I've heard it a lot of times because my wife is really into that one. It's just something, I don't know, I'm weird, I'm really hard to please. I'm also really easy to please, just do what I tell you! Do it the way it should be done, do it professionally, think of every possible detail and you've got me. Got me hooked. But once you start you start leaving things out, no one will notice, but I will know it. I will hear it. Every detail. And it will ruin my pleasure. I know it must ruin it for someone else. It's a weird disease. I wish I could some albums more time, because I can be very hard on that. One of my other favorite bands is EVERON, from Germany. I listened to that album when my wife got it for review and I just put it on while I was doing emails. I was like "Oh, this is so boring! Oh Germans pretending they play this metal prog blah blah." I just said to my wife, "That's not good, that's boring." She had to review it. And all of a sudden, she liked! I remember coming home from work one day, thinking "What is this, this is great!" She says, "That's EVERON. You said it was shit." Well, sorry! Is it another album? "No, it's the one you listened to." My mind was just like, "Not having any interesting for five minutes, shut off." Just doing the emails, not listening, not at all. I missed a lot of goodies. Some of the best songs I've heard in this genre are on that album. How the fuck could I have missed them the first time? Probably because there is not enough focus on the first minutes of the album. Some good, but they ruin it with some weird things. But EVERON is a great band. All their albums are excellent, if you can handle the German accent on the vocals. Killer band. I wish DREAM THEATER could sound like that. I don't want to slag bands off, but that's another band I feel is totally... I listened to *Images and Words* the other day and I nearly cried. What happened to this excellent band? Whatever became of these guys? Poor them. They have to fulfill all their teenage fantasies by playing with other band members in all these weird projects. Once it's time for DREAM THEATER, it's just another of these projects. *Images and Words* is such a milestone.

We're passing up subjects here, let me go back to something. About OPETH, obviously the clean vocals these days are a lot better. But live, when singing the old songs, he sings the clean vocal parts on the album then. It drives me nuts. If you can sing so much better now, why regress? Especially on some of the clean

parts of *Morningrise*, he's mumbling. You recorded him, what exactly was happening there?

A self esteem thing. I think he was unsure whether he was a good vocalist or not. It happened to me. I also am mumbling on a lot of places and Arjen was always pointing that one out to me, very straight. "Why the fuck did you sing this one with your mouth shut?" Sorry Dad! When I listen to it now, it's embarrassing. Then you can listen to some other songs, where I have more of a self confident feeling. Maybe some of the songs that were really tough to sing, you got so low that you were starting to sing in a more depressed way. That was never the problem with Mike. I guess he was not having the balls to really sing out, you know what I mean? Just get in there and with the same power, deliver the clean vocals as the growls. Then, they were just a full-out. Sometimes they have this clean vocals. Nowadays, it's more a part of their sound. I can't really remember anything about the vocal recording. All I remember is we wrote part of the vocal harmony for the recording pretty fast. I don't even have a copy of *Morningrise*, to be honest. I think someone stole it. I have a copy of the remaster I think. Maybe I should listen to it. A lot of times, I was afraid of telling people. I know Mike, he's a really good friend of mine. If you start criticizing people, or telling them how to sing, you can have a really weird mood going on in the studio. You can have anything from sarcasm to... you should just let people try to do their best. In the end, it's their album. If he likes to sing it that way, just let him do it. It could also be something, Mike has a pretty wild imagination. It could also be that he's impersonating something that he wants to sound like. Maybe he's changing his voice to sound more, I don't know, it's just a guess. Sometimes I realize this gang around Stockholm have some pretty wild things going. Especially Renske and Nystrom and Mike. Wild guys when it comes to imagination. There are some riffs on *Brave Murder Day*, they were giving me scenarios of what happens when they play this instrumental section. It's a windmill. One riff on *Brave Murder Day* is the windmill riff. You see someone who has hanged themselves in a windmill. They gave me the whole fucking scenario of what everything looked like. That was the riff! And it's instrumental. You would not get that vision. But they got that, and the way they were expressing themselves when they told me, and the way they were waving everytime this riff came, they were "Windmill..." It was weird. These guys are so weird! It was so evil! I can imagine that Mike has some pretty weird things going on in his mind of the scenario, something happening sometimes, when he's singing certain parts. That could be something happening. I must listen to that, this mumbling. I think he sang excellently on *Orchid*. I think his vocals are really good. A lot of effects on it, but it's solid singing.

Do you think the two album idea they have is good or bad for them?

I think it's good. They can start carving out the future of OPETH without having to compromise in a way. The same thing happened to AYREON, it's pretty much the same concept. One heavy, one proggy. He realized he should do prog, because he could do it, but also have metal to balance it out at the same time. I think he's pretty convinced that he's going to make a more progressive album for the next AYREON, and he did this STAR ONE project with us involved as the hard rock AYREON kind of material. The STAR ONE project is very similar to AYREON, but it's more classic hard rock mixed with the analog flavored synthesizers of AYREON, with the same drummer, and the same everything. Even some of the singers from AYREON are on STAR ONE. I think it's a good thing. OPETH can pull it off, if they make sure it's not too extreme. Not too soft and too hard. They have to have a few percentage OPETH and then have one album taking everything to one extreme a little bit more. My scale again, they both have to start at five, one is going all the way up to ten, the other is going all the way down to one, but you still need a bit of the five on both. Not one album of ten, and one album of one, then you're out. People still want a bit of a blend, you know? Maybe they can be even more extreme, and even more soft. That's what *Crimson* was. We could go from the slowest shit

we've ever written, to the fastest, meanest, baddest black metal impersonation. And the song is going from slow, to really fast, two different worlds changing in one second. That could never be done in a three minute song. You'd be locked up or something for such a weird change. But with a 40 minute playing time, you can do that. Building up emotions that justify that weird change. If OPETH does it the right way, they can take themselves to new extremes. But they must build it up in a smart way. If they want to be really fucking evil OPETH, because they can write some nasty, horrible, evil stuff, and that's horrible in a good sense, They should make that even more dominant on that album but they should not do it on one level, brutal only and this one having CAMEL ripoff only. I think Mike will pull it off, he's smart enough.

<At this point I ask him if he's heard the new GREEN CARNATION CD *Light of Day, Day of Darkness*, which has been compared to *Crimson* because it's one single album length song... he hadn't, so I explained what it was (and I've covered it so much in these pages anyway so I'm sparing you the drawn out version) and so Dan had more to say...>

The best part of writing long material, if you have a solid, almost tribal kind of line, you can take that one forever. It started with the Enigma track on *Unorthodox*. There's a riff there consisting of three notes, and we play that for one minute and fifteen seconds in a six minute track. Just starting off, and going through a lot of changes. We take these three notes and make every possible metal riff out of these three notes. We change the rhythm, we change everything, and it's the same riff all the time. It's a good simple riff. I love when I find this little piece of music that I can stretch forever. It's the best I'm happy for these guys if they managed to pull it off. One hour, I think that's a little bit too much. Someone is going to beat that. The new DREAM THEATER also has one track that's eight years long or something?

The longest song I've heard is this horrible, horrible black metal band, it was a single 72 minute song. It sucked.

Oh man. I could easily do that too, and it would suck also. There's nothing that can entertain you for that amount of time.

This guy in GREEN CARNATION, when they were doing the final playbacks in the studio, there's one part about 35 minutes in, where they just take everything down, and everyone in the studio feel asleep. He thought it was the greatest thing because he took it down.

Oh man. Falling asleep when you're listening to music is not a good thing. I'm really looking forward to doing something in the future that is one something again. I'm going to try to index this time.

One more jump back, *Brave Murder Day*, that's one of my massive albums of the 90s, and it honestly has a flat production. You said KATATONIA was going to be you and Anders doing something? What was that going to sound like? Isn't DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE just you and him?

We were going to do something Chris Isaac alike. As weird as it sounds. Something extremely melancholic, extremely sad, in a metal way. It was going to be the Chris Isaac of metal. We discussed this over the phone a lot, what it was going to be like. We were going to take the sad parts of *Dance of December Souls* and just make it a bit more professional. Then he called me one day and said "We're back together now. We're going to do something different." They just came to the studio. We were just going to write it in the studio. It was going to be a bit DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE type of collaboration, just me and him writing together. He'd take the band name credit and I would be the producer. We're still young, we could do this Chris Isaac thing sometime in the future.

That DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE, that's the big thing you've had come out since we last officially talked, that *Death's Design*. The one time here I've got to be a dick, but the whole thing about being a movie, my feeling is it never was an actual real movie. What's going on?

<my damn tape ran out right about here... luckily I've got a recent issue of the Swedish zine called, of all things, *Dessicated Cadaver* (it's apparently been around since death metal's heyday in one form or another... although they're only up to issue #6, where this is taken from), and thanks to writer Johan Erland for permission to reprint Dan's *Death's Design* answer here> "You'll have to ask Anders about this. I was in charge of producing an album for him. He had contact with someone that through his label, wanted him to write some kind of pure music for a movie on keyboards. Harmonies, backing stuff. Textures. That was the main idea. He had written all these pieces of music. In his mind, they were DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE songs with drums and guitars. All this West Hill was getting was keyboards. When the movie didn't happen, Anders was so upset that he had composed all these DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE keyboard songs. He wants to make them full songs, otherwise he'd just throw all these weird ideas away. So he called me and asked "Can we make another DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE album? I just had a soundtrack refused because of some budget problem." Well let's do it. Let's take your songs and say it was the soundtrack to the movie. But nobody has to know this isn't the version that was intended for the screenplay. That would be pretty lousy score music with all this 'roar.' Let's do it! Let's make all these small parts, let's take every single piece of music you made as a backing for a movie, and make it full metal orchestration..." <and picking back up on side B of the tape with my talk... who knows what happened in between here now...> The same thing happened with THERION. They were singing about rain forests and Coca Cola. They had the whole credibility thing. "THERION, that's evil! *Of Darkness*, grrr!" The Norwegians, they liked THERION even though they were death metal. They had this *Time Shall Tell* thing with no lyrics. Then they had the *Of Darkness* come out with the lyrics. And Christofer was threatened to death. They tried to burn his house down. The guitarist from PAN-THY-MONIUM bumped into BURZUM guy, that Varg Vikernes bloke, and he had his whole car full of axes and shit, and he was going to go to Stockholm and kill Christofer! I don't know if he ever got there, but he was driving from Norway to kill Christofer because he was singing Coca Cola and McDonald's on a death metal album. He was serious. The guy later proved to be pretty weird, killing period. He probably would have killed him, but for what reason?

The guy from GREEN CARNATION was telling me that the Inner Circle was planning on kidnapping one of the guys from ENTOMBED and kill him, just because ENTOMBED was a figurehead of death metal.

<sighs> I was always on the outside looking in with that. We had this pretty bad thing going on in my old hometown, with these ABRUPTUM and people gathering their... poor guys, some really weird shit going on there.

You worked with it on some things.

Me and It, there is no one in the whole metal genre that I've known for so long. I have great recollections of him and me in school camp. I was nine, ten, maybe? We were both playing in bands at the time. His band was called WITCHES SABBAT, and mine was called GHOST. We were in a competitive situation to get the most horrible song titles. I remember it came to the point we were making up song titles that didn't exist, out of the blue, to be even more extreme than the other one. We were both into MERCYFUL FATE at the time, then "Oh, he's also into VENOM! He's a pretty cool guy!" We started hanging out, and we formed my first band with any relation to this industry. It was called BRAINDEAD. He was the singer, I was the drummer. We were doing a lot of gigging. We did two or three demo tapes. We were dead serious, we were rehearsing like maniacs. And me and Tony [Sarkka], that's It's real name, we were really close. We were really friends. We were drinking like maniacs together, we crashed at each others' place. We could hang around and not talk about music. Just hang around. Then this Satanic stuff took over him for some reason. He got really involved. He's a really small guy, he reaches 150cm. A bit below my nipples. He's always the

Satan Dwarf or whatever. Big guys would just take him by the hair and throw him away when he was out drinking. He was getting really shy, not going out. When partying, it was never going out, it was always in his apartment. All black, all candles, all drinking. He got into this bad habit of meeting other people with weird minds. He was damaged by a really bad childhood. There was some father involved, not his father, but of his sister or brother or whatever, that was in and out of mental institutions, and they moved around a lot. He was really insecure, and being a small guy didn't help. He was trying to hide all of it, and I guess the Satanism shit was perfect. He was the main dude, he was the coolest, with the ABRUPTUM. And then we just drifted apart. It was the same with Morgan from MARDUK. He's one of the best friends I've ever had. We just drifted apart. Sad.

Wasn't ABRUPTUM just the two of them?

I introduced it to Morgan. The three of us used to have really weird parties. We were doing all this silly shit. I was a bit involved in this. It wasn't Satanic, it was childish crap. We were cutting our arms, drinking our blood. Believing we were evil and cool guys. We were just jerks. But they took that one step further. I just went home to Mommy.

I've never heard any of the ABRUPTUM stuff because from all descriptions, I just had no interest in it. Is it true that they were cutting and burning themselves in the studio and recording it?

That's really true. I recorded everything with ABRUPTUM. I am the one that made them sound evil. They were really bad. They played like assholes. They sounded horrible. I took the reverb unit and cranked it to eleven and made it sound like it was recorded in a fucking church. The biggest reverb ever made on an album. That made it sound, even to me, really fucking evil. Imagine standing in a school or something that is totally silent, then all of a sudden you hear something really disharmonic and weird echoing throughout the halls. I get goosebumps talking about it. It's weird. This sound coming from somewhere, very distant, very evil, very eerie, strange. It's not here. Where the hell does it come from? That's the sound of the ABRUPTUM demos, that's what made people freak out. This is the most evil recording. There's something in the ambience of that. They played like crap. There were no songs. They just tuned down the guitars and I played drums for a few songs. All of a sudden, they were not playing, they were out cutting themselves in the arm and smearing blood all over them and just whipping the guitar with something they found on the floor. It was this big jam session, with the lights out of course. Just this one candle so I could see the recording unit. It's true, they cut themselves real bad. I remember one really fun thing about the ABRUPTUM sessions. Tony was a pretty small guy. He wanted to crawl under a sofa, put a microphone in there, we would put the sofa over him and sit in it, so when he had this panic attack, it should be recorded on tape. <laughs> It was so really really funny. And he never got the panic attack! It was hilarious! But they were really cutting themselves with the knives I had around the studio. The knives were from like 1970, they'd never been sharpened, and I used them to cut metal stuff and whatever. Your average scissors were a lot sharper. They were trying really hard to cut themselves. It didn't work, so they're biting each other, "Get some blood here man!" So they start burning themselves. "Ow! That hurt!" It was not what you imagine. It was fun. There was a lot of blood. It was hilarious. For the album recording, there were tons of people coming down to the studio. I can't remember, like ten people just hanging out playing. Weird times. The classic was the recording of the second album. When Morgan and I made the second album, I just soundchecked one guitar and one drum kit. "That's good. I'm going home now, and I'll be back in 45 minutes." So I got in my car and went back, I had to wait a few minutes, out of tape, turn on the lights, bye then! The fastest album recording in history. In real time! I recorded them to DAT. No mixdown, no nothing. I just recorded to the master tape live. That's the second album. Really funny. Didn't cost them many Swedish crowns, I can tell you! It must have sold 10,000 copies! Remember the

movie Prince of Darkness? There's something about that movie, even just looking at the cover, that gives me chills. That inspired *Crimson*, by the way, the tank spinning with the green water. That's where I got the imagery for *Crimson*. It inspired the hell out of me. Tony was into similar stuff. He wanted to sense the evil. The soundtrack to *Omen* is one of the most evil recordings ever made and it's just strings, you know? This feeling you get in your body when you hear it, and I admit that I don't care for the albums of ABRUPTUM, they're just a lot of reverb. But the first demo, there was something happening in the rehearsal room, in the studio, whatever you want to call it. It was a really evil feeling in the air. I was pretty close to Tony around the time and I remember going to the gas station to buy the tapes to copy the demos, I helped him to copy the tape cover. Of course it was all black. I distributed it to some friends, I sold some. You and I could easily do something that sounded similar. Just a bunch of banging with effects. There was something, it was an accident in a way, that sound that came up. It was unique. No one had ever heard anything like it. More related to industrial music than black metal. It took everybody by surprise because there was a weird ambience in the music. That's what got them signed. I don't know if it's still around.

Have you heard GOBLIN from Italy? That's what I think of when I think of bands doing movie soundtracks.

The guy from ANCIENT played me some on tape when they were here. I've heard cover versions of GOBLIN songs from other bands. Pretty nice. Italian prog, mostly instrumental stuff.

For OPHTHALMIA's *Via Dolorosa*, is OPHTHALMIA studios Unisound?

Yeah.

How'd you get the name 'The Skull' for that one? They credited you Dan 'The Skull' Swanö.

OK. The skull was my stage name for a band I had together with Tony. He was it, and I was The Skull.

That album, the reputation he's got from everything else he's got, he's got Lenny Kravitz licks all over that album! Bizarre.

I listened to the first OPHTHALMIA demo the other day, I was going through a bunch of DATs the other day, the old Digital Audio Tape format. Really small cassette. That's when I found the first mix of the *Light's Bane* and I found all this other stuff. Then I found the OPHTHALMIA demo with the stuff from that album called *Journey in Darkness*. It's excellent! The demo is ten times better than the album. The guy from DISSECTION is singing on it, but Tony himself is singing on the demo. But Tony never had the guts to sing on the albums. I don't know why. He's got an excellent growling voice, really deep. That's OPHTHALMIA. When this guy from DISSECTION is singing, it sounds too much like anything else. On the demo, it was singing, and they mixed the growls with whispers. It was pretty unique at the time and then everyone started whispering.

That's an interesting trend for extreme metal. About that DISSECTION guy, with the time you spent around him, was there any sign that he was the kind of nutcase that was going to go out and try to kill people?

Nope. I didn't know him. I didn't know him in person at all. I knew he was just a little kid, really, I think. He was very influenced by stronger personalities. When he hooked up with this Vlad guy, who was not a musician at all really, just an evil dude, he just bonded with him in a way. I remember being in Gothenburg a few years ago, just before they did this horrible thing. I was at a pub hanging out, and I saw him there. I went up and said "How are you?" There was a sparkle in his eye, and he looked like he was happy to see me, it was nice. Then all of a sudden this Vlad guy came up to him, and just one look, the spark was gone, and Vlad just left. No bye bye, he just left. What was that? "Oh, that's the Vlad guy." It's hard to explain. I'd never experienced that before, I was totally lost the entire evening. Did I say something? What happened? They say he was totally obsessed with this Vlad guy. He was obviously something he'd wanted to be, that kind of evil character. Not a musician, just evil. He was a bit weirder when he was drinking. We were at

this party, and he just started banging on doors and people would open the doors and he would just start screaming in their face. Really weird behavior. I don't know if he was trying to be funny. I thought it was irresponsible, a childish act to do something like that. This is not fun, it's just upsetting his neighbors. His idea of having a good time was not my idea of a good time. He just got carried away with this other guys. I guess it was one of those "Show me what you got. He's a fucking faggot, kill him!" Just under the influence, he just did it. He could be influenced by group pressure. And he did it, and destroyed one of the best careers ever in this genre. Everything would have been so much different if DISSECTION would have continued putting out albums.

They're already started marketing his return, because apparently he's going to be out of jail in the not far future. Rumor going around is that he has two albums written and ready to go.

He's got plenty of time.

Talking about some of these characters we're talking about, I can see why people can grow out of metal if that's the kind of metal they're into.

But finishing off the Tony subject, I know his sister's husband. He's the guitar player in BRAINDEAD. We're also connected in the selling stuff industry. I speak to him sometimes on the phone, and I tell him to just say hi to Tony. I haven't spoken to him in years and years. When they killed this guy in Gothenburg, he just snapped from the whole industry. He moved away. He doesn't have anything to do with it anymore. He doesn't play, doesn't do anything. He's just a normal guy. He just came to his senses, I guess. "This is too much, I quit. Bye bye." Broke all the bonds with the scene. He's just somewhere in Stockholm being a normal guy. It's such a weird thing to go from one extreme to a different extreme. He's totally out of the whole thing. That's just me filling in, it's better off to just leave the shit. Two dead and one in jail from the most influential black metal band... and I never saw BURZUM as being influential. He was quite a character. But Eurononymous was very important for the current sound of black metal. He was a lot older than the other guys. He was very mature, he introduced new concepts in this genre that would never have existed if not for him. He never got the credit for it. But I hear what he did, it was all over all the albums from the Swedish bands. Before they managed to get this *Mysteriis* album out. Once they chose these weird vocals for it, it destroyed the reputation. Imagine classic death metal growling and black metal vocals on this *De Mysteriis* album. It would have been a killer, even to me. But I can't stand those vocals.

Onto hopefully more cheerful topics. You've worked with two of the divas of heavy metal and related things. Did Kim Goss actually do her vocals for the ANCIENT album in your studio?

Yeah.

What was she like there? There are all sorts of stories about her.

She was a nervous wreck. A trembling poor girl that was so nervous. You hear that in her singing. She's trembling! She was really nice. I don't follow the metal industry. I've heard stories about her that are weird. But I could never imagine that the same shy girl that I recorded did all these things that people tell me she's done. So I just leave it. She sent us pictures of her and me and my wife. The whole ANCIENT recording was really cozy. The American guys that came over were really nice people. The drummer left pretty early. The main Ancient dude didn't say much. Just your basic not-talking-too-much kind of guy. But the singer, he was really funny and he was a prog head and all that. Kimberly was really nice. She'd never done any serious singing before. I had to encourage her and it's a bit out of tune sometimes. I made her sing as well as I had the opportunity to. I didn't have the professional correction equipment. I had all tape recorders back then. If she didn't sing good, I couldn't do shit. I encouraged her to do the best possible thing. I think the first song on *The Cainian Chronicle* is really good. The rest is alright.

You surprised she's got success fronting a heavy metal band?

What do you consider the best part of your trip?

I remember the reaction of the crowd when my brother presented me. "The man, the rock, the concept." And I remembered the sound from the audience. I totally let go of all emotions and put my hands in the air and took the inspiration that was in this hall at that time and just soaked it up. It's still in me, and it's fuel for future albums. It's hard to explain, but I've never experienced this reaction from a crowd before, ever in my whole life. Hopefully I will do it again sometime. It was a very personal show. We were winning over a lot of people in the audience, but there were also people like you and Glenn [Harveston, promoter of ProgPower USA], and people that traveled a long way. And Shane [Schecht], who was probably responsible for me being there in the first place. Without him constantly telling me to put NIGHTINGALE together as a live act, and do all these songs. "No, it won't happen, in your dreams. You'll see PAN-THY-MONIUM in Wembly before you see NIGHTINGALE." And all of a sudden, it just happened. Once we got started, it was easy. We did the first shows as really stripped down versions. Then we thought, play the whole fucking intro and all, play keyboards! Do it! And to see all these people, especially him, telling him "You're never going to see us play Deep Inside of Nowhere in the United States, you can stop dreaming," and then finally doing that, it was pretty emotional. That's what I remember from the show. It's a great feeling. Especially just hanging around, talking to all the people that came to the table. All these people telling you all these wonderful things about what your music has meant to them, and all these emotions that were flowing in all these people, that's really the best point of my career, ever, to be around that table. And just sit there and see that. All that sacrifice, all the phone calls with Black Mark when they told me I had to do this or I had to do that, and I told them to fuck off because this is my thing and I'm going to do it my way, and the bad vibes around the decisions that made these albums, and to see it reached out to these people exactly in the way I wanted it to reach out. The non compromises of *Moontower*, the non compromises of NIGHTINGALE, directly from me to you. The ones that pick it up, and they swallowed it exactly how I wanted them to, they were so getting the right picture. It was the biggest reward of all time to see that these people totally got it. All there, you know? I've spoken to people who have had this reaction on the phone or through mail, but to have them there, to have a conversation with these people, and they're not from my town, they went out and bought the album, they listened to it, they got something from it. That's really strong stuff. I was on another planet all evening. When I die, that event will certainly be in that little story of my life. I don't really see where to go from there. I couldn't really take more. At a certain point, you get like "Yeah, yeah" where you've heard it before. I'm not there now, but if 200 people every day tell you how good you are and how cool all your albums are, maybe it'll get to you after awhile. Not many people have told me this straight to my face before. It was a really encouraging experience. I don't want to get more hysterical than that, ever. I don't want to experience not being able to get out of the tour bus in Germany because so many fans were banging on the window. I was scared. I wanted to go out and talk to them, but they were stupid German heavy metal fans and they wanted to behave like fans because they thought we were stars. I was just a guy who wanted to get in and eat. So I had to sit on the tour bus because they wouldn't let me out. I don't want to do any of this hysterical fan artist god thing. I just want to talk and communicate with people who have chosen to follow my very narrow path. I don't care fuck for the mainstream. They can die. Straight from me to my audience. When I say "This is good," there's a percentage of metalheads or music lovers or whatever that share my vision. That belongs to my family. It was great to meet many of them that I've been communicating with on emails. That's totally worth every second on that fucking airplane!

After everything you've done, it's still weird that it's NIGHTINGALE that got you to America.

EDGE OF SANITY wouldn't have felt right. That was me in 91, then it was me fulfilling a contract. I was really in it when I did *Unorthodox* and *Nothing But Death Remains*. But then I walked out and saw you can do a goth song, you can do a punk song, and you can change a few heads, you can confuse people. With NIGHTINGALE, it's really outside looking in, for the first album I was making a goth album. The second album and the third album, that was my music. It was the closest I've ever been to having a band. My brother was involved, at least two people communicating on the same level. With UNICORN, it was a recording project throughout the whole of the 90s. We made our best songs and demos on the cross of 89 and 90. Then UNICORN turned into something that was like a really bad marriage. Then we got NIGHTINGALE, me and my brother, and then we got this new lineup, it was like a band again. When I was rehearsing it felt really good. I was happy that I could come over with a band where we have more fun offstage than onstage. Normally we didn't have any fun onstage, and we didn't have any fun offstage with the other lineups of my other bands. But just the four of us, especially my brother, and Erik, they're so funny! Weird fucking people. It feels so good not having to be the entertainer all the time. Just because I sing and have written most of the material doesn't mean that I have to run the show around the clock. It's good to just relax and laugh for a change.

Anything about your trip that wasn't how you thought it was going to be?

Not really. Not that I can think of. I had all these scenarios of getting caught in customs and being sent home. I still wake up having nightmares of being sent home at customs. I was a wreck! I hate that. I hate the customs. They are so emotionless. They don't care about people's artistic vision, they are just looking at figures, this is my job, you can't go here, you must go there. I hate these kinds of institutions, it's the worst thing in the world. It's just that I have realized now that once I go on stage, I'm in this universal country where anything can happen, like broken bass amps, or you don't hear yourself. It doesn't matter if you're in America or in Tibet. A bad show, a good show, it doesn't really matter. It was an average show for us, if you weigh in everything with the monitoring, the technical difficulties, it's an average show. If you take the peaks with the connection with the audience, to see people sing along, then it's the best show of my life. That's the thing, you know if you travel such distance with so many people and so much preparation, the show must be an obvious best ever. Yeah, the trip! The show at the metalfest in Sweden with the similar stage was a lot better, the average feeling throughout the show was a lot better, but with no peaks. Between the songs, it was like <yawn>, silent, staring at me. We did great versions, it felt good. In Atlanta, there was an electric feeling in the air, I had the feeling that people were loving this music, you know? I didn't feel that at the metalfest because they were all waiting for Paul Di'Anno and DESTRUCTION, and that's pretty far off from our stuff. There was really nothing that disappointed me. The arrangement and everything was great. I learned not to expect too much now. If I did that show five years ago, I would have expected so much more. All countries are the same at a certain level, it's all humans there.

The last time we talked, you'd just released the last NIGHTINGALE album. I didn't have the lyrics at that time.

And now you have.

It's, uh, not the most clear storyline in the history of the world. Let's clear some of that up.

Of course.

Because the second and third albums don't sound like these mean and dark things. But the subject is murder, suicide, possession and all that. And that's going back to the weird, sick shit.

The storyline to me, it was never good in the first place. It was not meant to be more than one album. The concept was not strong enough even for one album. And then it's one hell of a problem to try to stretch it for three. I know there are obvious flaws. It's not a movie script at all. I've

started a couple of times to write the whole explanation, the whole complete storyline. I've only come to the *Breathing Shadow* all the time. I was so terrified when I wrote the lyrics, I didn't go home because I was so afraid of walking out the door. That's the truth. This place where I did *The Breathing Shadow* was in the cellar. No nothing. No telephone, no windows, no toilet, just a dusty, moldy rehearsal room locked away far out. I actually slept in the studio because I was scared to walk home in the middle of the night. I saw all these characters, and I still get goosebumps the size of basketballs when I think about the feeling I had when I did some of these lyrics. It was me in the main role. I was doing these weird shifts going there at eight in the morning and leaving at eight the next morning. With no break, just me and my music. No food, nothing! It was the biggest release ever after recording all these boring albums. Me and no other people, here we go! I wrote Nightfall Overture in like 10 minutes, it just came out. And I was supposed to do a goth rock album! What the fuck did I do this epic metal shit for? But it was a good song, so let's go on. Then I wrote the album in a chronological order. What was going to fit the playing order. "Now to write an uptempo track!" And I wrote *The Dreamreader*, then I needed a slow song... But the storyline, the first album lyricwise is the *I* [eye] album. Or the *I* [one] album, whichever you want to call it.

Which is correct?

Both are correct. It's both *I* [one] and *I* [eye]. It's pretty much *I* [one], really. The classic one, two, three, four LED ZEPPELIN kind of thing. *I* [eye] also works, because *I* [eye] was the first ever title for *The Breathing Shadow*, because that was a personal album. But then I was afraid that people would not understand that it was not called *I* [one]. So I skipped that title. I was thinking of having the phonetics written out. I looked really ugly in the phonetic language, but it would have added a nice graphic touch to it. It's nothing on the cover. I just felt it should be something simple. The storyline is some guy. His parents are pretty freaky, so he's just running away from home. That's a normal, pretty boring scenario, he's saying goodbye to his sister. In my vision, that's pretty basic. A basic family with basic problems. A rude father, and this kid is having problems and he's running away. I see this scenario of this little town in the middle of nowhere. Once he's crossing one of the few roads leading out of this little town, he's in this huge forest, which is like neverending. A little bit like a Stephen King scenario. This little village kind of thing. There's maybe 15 houses. He's just walking in this forest, he's been there so many times before. And suddenly it's like the forest is an entity. We still don't know if this guy's awake or not. He's walking around doing all this great shit, and suddenly this other guy comes up. We still don't know if he's real or not, or if the other guy is awake or not. These two characters meet. They're just two guys, between 10 and 15 or so. They start off as friends, but they're not an exact match for personalities. They're similar in a way. They're trying to get competitive. It's a really big forest and they're getting a bit lost. They don't want to get out of the forest, they're running from something, and they feel they are safe in the forest. They just start this 'can you do this?' "Sure I can, but I can do it much cooler than you!" This childish crankish kind of stuff. Then they get into really dangerous stuff, involving knives and things. Then they get to this strangling game, which is a true story I wrote about in a magazine a few days after I started *The Breathing Shadow*. Some boys in Iceland had been doing this hanging game, I think it's a kinky thing. Just before you go, you pass all these kinds of fluids, and if you're released at just the right time, it's supposed to be the biggest ever, you know? For some reason, the main character is challenging. "Go on, I'll cut the rope, I don't want to kill you. Show me you got the guts." But for some reason, we still don't know what's preventing him, he's not cutting the rope. There is a blank. He totally freezes. Either something is taking control of him at this moment, or he's paralyzed with fear. He sees what happens to someone suffocating in this tree. The guy dies in the tree. He kind of freaks out and runs away from there, leaving him hanging. How nasty! In this Remorse

and Regret and Alone, he's just lying under a tree trying to hide from reality. He goes back, and the kid is gone from the tree. The kid is gone, but the rope is still there. There's no sign of anyone falling. Nothing. He's just gone. He freaks out totally and starts hiding away. You have this scenario where he's trying to drown himself, because he's a miserable... When he's at the bottom of the lake, just passing out, something drags him out of the water. It's really deep down. From a lot of depth, pulling him up. He wakes up wet lying around in kind of a swamp. Eww! What the fuck happened here? We still don't really know if this guy went into the forest, dreamed all this, accidentally rolled up in a swamp and woke up all wet, we still don't know which part is dreaming, or if he really went into the forest in the first place or if he's still dreaming. I want to leave all ends open here because we don't know what's going to happen on the fourth album. I want people to be like "This is a tricky bastard!" I haven't really decided what the fuck is going on! But I can tell you the visions I have at the moment. This is where I stops pretty much. He's going home, because being at home with his abusive parents, the only love he gets is with his little sister and that can be cool. He'll go back and live his pathetic life. Just one day, he's out walking around in this forest, still living in the same area. There's just something in the air. That's Nightfall Overture. Something's not right. Something with the light of the moon, with the wind in the forest. Then he hears these voices calling to him, telling him to fall asleep. That's the only thing he can think of. "I don't want to fall asleep. Something in the air is telling me to sleep." [Uh oh, he's reading lyrics again... -ed] Weird emotions going on. I remember then you have the Dreamreader. He's somehow falling asleep. And when he's falling asleep, that's when the communication with this other level of consciousness is through his sleep. It's the ghost of the kid in the forest lost on the rope. He's trying to communicate with him on the same level, when he's sleeping. That's when he's more open.

How much time has passed since the kid hanged and when he's trying to communicate again?

Like five years? Life is totally back to normal. "Just another midnight hour, enjoying the cold of a dark winter night." He's over it. He's so over it, he doesn't really remember at first who the fuck is calling. Like one week after, it would be obvious. "Oh, that's the guy I killed. Fuck." But he's put it in the back of his mind. He's living a pretty normal life. I guess I saw him my own age. I guess I was around 20, 21 when I wrote this. It's pretty much me there. "I hear the shadow say go to sleep my friend, but I remain awake. I dream, and then fade away." That's when he's exhausted really, just falling asleep. "I fly away to another dimension, far beyond reality. I fly away from these evil voices, it takes me back to my childhood and these hateful memories. The show is rolling before my eyes, and once again I see the tragedy." He's back in the house around the Scarred For Life drama thing going on, and he's just totally sleeping here. "I feel like I'm fading away, the shadow comes closer and it wants me to stay." It's like even in his sleep, something is not good. He's very much asleep but there's this thing entering his dreams. Even dreaming, he knows that it is not right, this is not a dream. It's a bit back to Prince of Darkness, you know "We are communicating from the year 1999." This business, you remember that? Every time they fall asleep in Prince of Darkness, there's this monk character transmitting "This is not a dream." They are transmitting the future to him. That's the idea I had. This communication that can only enter his mind when he's sleeping at first, because it's weak. In Higher in the Sky, he is right in middle of a forest, falling asleep. The ghost of this guy is finally able to communicate with him on a very light level. "I woke up lying in this bed, I didn't know if I was alive or dead." This gypsy woman, we still don't know, hehehe, if she's real or not, but he's obviously lying in a bed somewhere. It's just like a clock ticking, total silence, nobody in the room, and he's thinking what the fuck just happened? He was out walking, why did he fall asleep on his traditional night walk? He remembered hearing the voices from the night trip. "If I only knew what was going on, I hear no voices,

I pray to God that they're gone. Someone must have found me and brought me here, I've been released from all doubt and fear. Then this woman came into the room." She didn't really speak his language, just some kind of Gypsy language. But she made him feel safe and he realized he'd been out for something wicked, and he'd better stay and rest. He felt safe. "She found me lifeless in the cold, and there was something about me that wasn't right. She rescued me from eternal night." He was frozen death, pretty much, and the Recovery Opus is just him in the cozy bed philosophizing about, it's not your average happening. What's happening here? Then you have The Return to Dreamland. That's the soundtrack to his first dream in the bed. In the safety of being somewhere warm. Then the Gypsy Eyes song, despite all the bad grammar, people think it's a love song but this gypsy woman, she's like 60 years old. There's something about her that is not natural. Not human. What's she doing there? You don't find gypsy women walking around this forest! That's where you don't know if this is still a dream within a dream like SYMPHONY X would have said. There is the character of the gypsy woman, and this man lying in bed. Whether it's really happening, or part of a dream, or part dream, but this is what's happening. You should have an open mind, and just like when you saw stuff like Sixth Sense, you don't really know, but when you watch it the second time you realize all the details. I want people to be prepared for a major twist on the next album that puts the concept in a completely different angle. I'm working on it. It's going to be a weird one. I want everyone to keep every angle open, because I'm going to find a loophole here in the story and I'm going to mess it up bigtime! I'll have to open a support line for you. In Gypsy Eyes he's waking up from the dream he had when I played The Return to Dreamland song. "Back on my feet, I'm standing, but I can hardly walk. I'm bound to mystery, I'm the sparrow she's the hawk." She's a very strong personality. She's telling him, more in a way, not talking, but to stay here. It's safe here. Don't go. Not good! But he, or I am, like "This is weird. What day is it? What's happening here? I need to go home. My family must be thinking where the fuck am I?" He just walks out of there. Then for Alone, "I'm thinking of the voices from the parklane, how come they just disappeared? Right now I'm back where it all started." He's thinking of the woods, the hillside, "The best friend I ever had, I killed him, and I'll always remember his face." It's coming back to him. Once he got the touch of all this supernatural stuff. "There's something spooky going on out here, and the only spooky thing I've been through is the forest incident in my childhood." So he's recalling that. "And the voices are only one voice, I hear it much clearer now. It's like on another level, where I can hear the words without a blur, and it seems like we can communicate. I hear him say he's such a lonely soul, a spirit from the lonely skies. And somehow I recall the voice, but I just can't place it in time. 'Hey, you should remember me' it said, and then it was gone, faster than it came." That's from being a <static noise> kind of voice, through this noise was a clear voice talking to him. That freaked him out totally. "I'm walking down the lane and I'm shaking. Now the voices have returned." This is one of the weak points in the story. "And I wonder who the hell I've been forsaking." He should pretty much should know who the only guy after his ass is. Maybe he's confused. Maybe he's plain stupid. He realizes there's a problem coming here. "I saw my shadow move. But I didn't move." That's where somewhere the communication has become so strong that it's gone from when he's sleeping, he can disturb his dreams, and now he's got the strength to communicate with him when he's awake. This soul of the guy who's been hanged is trapped in a parallel sky somewhere, between real life and going to sleep. He passed out too soon from this Earth. He's pretty close, you can't see him, but he's actually around. He's not completely erased from the Earth. That's when he gains enough strength to possess the shadow on this main character. That's the first part of taking over his body. That's the scary part, that's when I couldn't go home. When I did that 'I saw my shadow move', and the music was like "Oh momma!" I was so terrified! I hadn't spoken

to anyone in like 24 hours. I was totally alone in the whole world and I was singing a track called Alone and I was so scared.

The vocal at the end of that song sounds pretty creepy, the "It's not my shadow."

Then comes this beautiful 'everything's OK', then we go to A Lesson in Evil, and that's when things start getting really nasty. When he's trying to escape from the shadow, but all of a sudden it's true fucking possession going on here! The shadow is growing stronger and it's taking over his body. The soul of this hanging tree character, we can call him Mr. Dead, he's just possessing, taking over the mechanics of 'my' body. I see through my eyes what is happening, but there is no way I can control my limbs. What it does pretty much, I am walking myself to the exact same place in this forest. For some strange reason, the noose is still hanging in the tree. Maybe this part of the forest doesn't really exist to others. Having the noose hanging there for 17 years, that's one of the parts of the story that I felt must be something about this place where they were at this specific time of the ritual. It's not there all the time. It's opening up. It's pretty freaky! It's the only natural solution. I've seen it in movies. That can happen. <laughs> It's still there, the very same noose. He's controlling this guy to hang himself. "Now it's your turn, mister!" He just climbs up there, he doesn't know how to stop it, he takes his own hands, puts the noose around his neck, and just hangs himself to death. End of story. That's where the story ends for the first time.

When you had done that album, did you have any idea where it would go from there, or that there would be another one at all?

No. It's really tricky. I was refusing! I was saying I don't have a concept. I don't have a massive overflow of material that's not EDGE OF SANITY. I had all these goth things. Mainly I had one track that was a bit Sacrificed-alike, and I didn't want to repeat that. When I had this track that turned out to be Sleep, in a way this ROSETTA STONE goth rock, and I felt that was enough. I did my own kind of music for the rest of the album. It's just a few years later that I thought it would be a bit of a prog rock thing going. I was listening again to my roots, listening to GENESIS and MARILLION and all that. I got together with my brother. Then I found out the story could be continued. What happens in Deep Inside of Nowhere is that we follow 'me' from the moment that I die from life on Earth. "Surrounded by silence, no one is hear but me." It's obvious that he's in this darkness. I think it's pretty clear what happens. The storyline from here is pretty fucking wicked! I saw a movie, a Danish movie called The Reich if you translate it. It's pretty much a vague ripoff of that storyline from some parts. It inspired me to both *Crimson* and this one. It's a really good movie. Then it's like, imagine you're in this darkness and suddenly the darkness is not as dark. It's brighter and brighter, and then it's like <swooping sound>, it's like I'm fading away and falling asleep. What's happening is he's passing from the face of total darkness to... "You are going to be another! You're not going to remember anything from your past life." It's the factory of souls that are recycled. That's what happens. "My vision is gone, erasing the one I am... I can't remember where I am, I can't remember where I used to be." The thing is this. They don't really do it well. He can still have a few recollections. "But I can remember what I think right now. Am I closing in on heaven, or am I closer to hell?" Revival is the other guy, Mr. Dead talking. "No longer a shadow, once again I walk the face of the Earth. I'm in his body, I'm free to live." That's him talking. The whole of this concept is pretty much characters. I didn't want to write Mr. Dead or The Gypsy Woman, but it's very much different people talking all the time. "I see the horizon through the eyes of a stranger, the one that I'm living inside. For seventeen years I've been held in the darkness, my life is no longer denied." Quite a time. Seventeen years. That's the time from the day he died, to this storyline. That's making him even more eager to live again. "I regained the power, I was strong, I returned. Like a breathing shadow, I will receive what I've earned. Even though I pretend I am someone else, I have finally had my revenge." This is Mr. Dead living again in the

body of the one he controlled to hang. Then you have Thoughts From a Stolen Soul, which is back 'me' in the storyline. "Suddenly something changed inside as like the darkness turned to light. And I saw reflections from the past flashing by, like a starfall in the night. It feels like I'm turning into someone else, it's like my past life said goodbye. Reincarnation of our souls, well now I know it's not a lie. I wonder what I'll be or when I'll arrive, the magic moment my body comes alive. But who am I to say all this, I may not even remember what I miss. I can come to a different part of the Earth, maybe to another world. Who can tell?" He hasn't been completely erased. There's still this new life. He's pretty much throughout the whole album, the me character is in the state where he's gone from complete darkness, knowing what he is, to a not very well succeeding formatting. He's waiting to be another person. His old personality is morphing with a blank personality so he's fading out.

One thing that throws me off, I thought Gypsy Eyes was a love song. But here in Thoughts From a Stolen Soul, "How I could dream again so I could dream of you, But it took the last of my soul, but I remember you." Who's the you?

It's the gypsy woman. Other people will have this soap opera love affair going, but this is a deeper kind of affection. Right now, he's gone through so much weird shit that the only person that he's been touching has been the gypsy woman. That's the one in his vision. Sometimes it's like a love story thing going, but just wait, it gets even more weird. "It seems my mind is harder to erase, I may remember too much from the past. The darkness' no longer carrying me, and it feels like I'm back at square one. The pressure is driving me insane, and maybe there's no sanity left. This stage of cleansing is twisting my thoughts, I can think no more, and once again I'm falling asleep." The end of the whole erasing thing. "Unintelligent life is born, our friend is no longer here. He's replaced, he's initialized, and no one shed a tear." Well finally they erased this one! They can put him somewhere. The next time someone is born into the world, he might be the one popping into this little baby, then he'll go on, reincarnation. "He was so eager to live again, but now he's gone for all time. It took the last of his soul." End of story. So Long is the gypsy woman. "I wish all the emptiness would end and my friend would return." Friend, not lover! "Though I know you're still alive, I'm scared, I'm almost paralyzed, of the emotions growing inside. And something is missing." It's all about the memory of two people that didn't know each other. They didn't even talk. She obviously didn't know his language. So Long (Still I Wonder) is the gypsy woman. She knows, something changed in the air. "Oh shit, now he's gone. He's over." It's time for some serious action here! Steal the Moon is the Mr. Dead guy. "It's strange in here, knowing I'll have your name. I'll never be me, I'm like art in a stolen frame."

Who is the 'you' as far as Mr. Dead is concerned?

Somehow, some way, there is a communication here. Steal the Moon is an old song that I wrote a long time ago. I liked the title so I just tried to squeeze it in the concept. This one's a bit loose. [Dan gave me an explanation that he clarified the next day in an email, so I'll just give you that: "I just remembered that (due to serious tiredness!) that I was way out of line with the storyline of Steal The Moon. It is an "I love you as a brother" song from the 'shadow' to 'me' (Now dead and waiting to be reborn) I guess it's a Remorse and Regret kind of situation where the shadow regrets his action of taking over his body and killing him."] When the Gypsy Woman felt that "Oh shit, he's completely erased," that's the part when she's actively seeking the body of 'me', with the soul of Mr. Dead. That's really when she is having a bit of a physical love affair with him, weird as it may sound because she's an old woman. The shadow believes that the gypsy woman doesn't know shit about this. "Here I am in this body, and this woman believes I am him, ha ha." In the Intermezzo track, it's the gypsy woman. "I woke up with a feeling of emptiness inside, Suddenly felt so lonely like a part of me had died." That's really confirming that she knows something is really, really not good. She has to do something drastic here. "So

I seduced a shadow, and what might be you came into my womb." This is really weird shit. She's making sure that the shadow in the body of me is having some kind of intercourse. She is becoming pregnant because she knew that the first soul in line to be reborn is this bloke that just died. Alive Again, "I can feel your heart inside me, you are alive like the wind, and soon your soul will be free again. I know that I have saved you from the other side, it's like the evil around me is scared because of my pride. All my life I wished for this moment to come, when my body would put a newborn light upon the Earth. I can feel it inside, I can feel that it's you. And you will never believe that you have been alive before. I know your soul is erased, the whole of you is defaced, even though your body's here, it's not my friend inside. I know that your soul will be alive again... The time has come I can feel the ache inside, you have decided to leave the ocean sky tonight. No one is here to bring you into this world, I'll try to deny my pain and help you out alone." She's giving birth to him right in her home or whatever. Then the shadow arrives. She found out, during the love affair kind of thing, inside 'me' is the nasty kind of guy. "And then the shadow arise, I can see in his eyes, he no longer denies the fact that you will be reborn." We leave the story here that me, with the shadow inside, sees the little baby born and he gets it. "Oh shit, when this kid grows up, he's going to come after my ass!" I can tell you the storyline of the next album is taking off from this kid growing up a bit like Harry Potter, not knowing anything about his past. When he's the right age, this gypsy woman will tell him the story. And he will go after him, with the soul of the one he killed in the forest. He's the shadow man, that's what he's called in this new concept. It's going to be a constant battle between the one he used to be, the one possessed by the shadow, and his soul reborn in this completely new character. And the gypsy woman, those are the three people lined up for the next album. It's pretty much going to be a battle of good and evil, the way I feel it. I'm trying to find the loopholes in the story to make a few twists. Some things did not happen. We've had this conversation so I realize I must fill in a few gaps here and there. Maybe I can do this with the lyrics of the fourth one. I can explain in lyrics, hopefully, about the gaps. If I was into this for real, I'd write books. It was good to have this conversation because it cleared my mind as well. But once you get the character shifts in *The Closing Chronicles*, it all makes sense. I never thought of that, to be honest. To me, it's all clear.

There's nothing to let you know...

I know, I know. That's from the stress I was going through when I was putting all these lyrics together. The lyrics were never printed in the booklets. The lyrics weren't printed at all, I had to listen and pick them up from my own album and write them down. Then there was a fan in Germany who sent me the lyrics for correction, and I corrected it, and sent it back. For him! It was nice to have all the lyrics on this one album. That's how I forgot about all this character business.

You had two albums of a continuing concept. Why weren't the lyrics in those two to begin with?

Lack of time, really. There was always something about Black Mark that was very fast. "OK, you're finished, when can we have it? Yesterday?" Oh shit! "I don't have the time for that. No lyrics, OK?" "That's OK!" To be really honest, it could have been easy for me to go home that day and print the fucking lyrics. I was afraid the storyline wouldn't hold for print. There were some grammatical errors, 'are' instead of 'is', some things that at the time felt like the whole world. "That's the wrong word, oh shit!" I didn't print the lyrics because some of them would be obvious when you read them. When you listen, sometimes you don't pay attention. That's one of the things that was going on when I played the album to my wife and some friends. They were pointing out some of the grammar that was not right. I didn't feel like enhancing this thing by typing it. That was one of the main things. After awhile, when I starting to look back at these albums, they were a little less than 100% dead serious. Well I had to admit that I was not the best, but I also wanted something special for the I album. We had the internet thing coming, and downloading albums and

stuff. So what could I give people that they don't already have? That's the lyrics. There will be a fair chance for Black Mark to actually sell a few copies of the album as well. So we did. One of the biggest booklets ever made! Quite a lot of pictures. The guys that did the layout did a really good job, and they did it all for free. Fantastic people. And they totally got the story. One of them also wrote a lot of the lyrics, this Tommy Elkhart guy. Someone I met on the internet.

The Closing Chronicles, is that the tree on the cover?

It doesn't look that way. The tree is pretty much how it looks on the I cover. That's my forest. But at the time that I did the album cover description who did the cover, it was a stress thing. I never imagined my forest blue. To me it was brown, just like the I cover. It's a free interpretation of my forest through someone Finnish. That's the cover. As long as it's got the noose on it, it's working. [Am I nuts or is there no noose on *The Closing Chronicles* or the I covers? - ed] It's not the best album cover I've seen. But it works. It's got that cold feeling that I like.

Did *Breathing Shadow* or *I*, did they move anywhere other than in metal circles?

Breathing Shadow got pretty well on in goth rock circles. I've had some offers from goth bands to sing. It was mostly Sacrificed from EDGE OF SANITY times, they played cover songs. There were some reviews in goth related magazines, but they all felt it was too split, not enough goth. The first one shifted a lot of copies. The second one did nothing. I did nothing either. It kills me in a way. It's the way it's supposed to be. Easy come, easy go in some ways. Not saying it was easy to make it, but I didn't make an effort to sell it. I made quite an effort to record it and write it, but once I finished the master tapes it was like "OK, what's next here?" And left everything to Black Mark. They did what they were supposed to do, just send it out to the distributors, and you're already in the loop. Just average sales. You need a lot of money to stick out these days.

So when you're saying it did nothing, how many copies are we talking?

Maybe a thousand.

Are you serious?

Yeah. I'm happy if it sells a thousand copies that did not come back. A thousand people bought it! What made it possible for me to sell I in Atlanta is they sent back 70 copies from the States. They were out of print and I was like "Please, I need copies!" Now they've reprinted all the stuff, including *Moontower*. It's a lot because I've been trying to tell people please mailbomb Black Mark! Tell them that you want this, tell them that you want that. But they reprinted, and I'm happy, even if it's only 500 copies, it's great. I've never sold that many titles of a NIGHTINGALE album. The net of distribution, maybe I've sold 100 copies in Sweden, tops, in Sweden. I've never seen it in any store. It's scary! But that's the way it is around here. The distribution is very lacking.

As far as the albums you've written and performed on, what's been the best seller?

I think it's been the *Purgatory Afterglow* album. I can't remember any exact figures, this might be totally wrong, I think it did thirty or forty thousand copies worldwide for quite an extensive period of time. The Japan deal, we were doing the deal around *Crimson*, and they re-released the others in Japan. *Purgatory Afterglow* got a boost in Scandinavia because this guy in MACHINE HEAD was reviewing albums from Swedish metal bands in a really big magazine here, and he slagged every band off except for us. He gave us highest ratings. "This is cool shit, can I have the album?" That made quite a good impact on the whole metal scene around here. We won an award for best metal band in Sweden that year and we were not even there to accept it. That was a pretty good year for us. We had stuff like *Twilight* and *Black Tears* and we had the video. They put the video on Viva, even though the video is crap. It's not pathetic crap, it just looks a bit home-ish. It looks lo-fi. I did a lot of it myself. We shot pictures, and I shot the TV screen with another video camera to get the really lo-fi, and using the macro zoom on the TV set to get this really big resolution, weird looking thing. It was a good effect, we were trying all

these effects. We were taking fake diamonds and taping them to the video camera lens, and you had these eight weird 'ooh!' kind of pictures. It was analog, we didn't have any facilities. We spent one whole day editing that shit in Stockholm, and it went out of sync after one minute so it looked like crap. I think Viva was the only one to show it. But judging the amount of money I got around that time for the publishing, it sold something around thirty or forty thousand, including Japan. Nothing more than that. THERION must have been the best seller so far that I've been on. I think they sell quite a lot. I think the albums that have sold the best that I've been involved recording must have been MILLENCOLIN. They're about to have a gold record, my first, for the Life on a Plate album. If you see me as a producer for MILLENCOLIN, I produced about ten percent of their songs, I've sold millions of albums with them. That's cool for a punk band!

I seem to like music that doesn't get out to very many people.

That's why we connect. That kind of music is like really fine art or really fine wine. I don't want to make all these really big comparisons, but it's not mass product. It's not made to be available on a large scale. It's very important to me that I don't get into this mass production kind of thing. We were on the verge of doing that with EDGE OF SANITY. Around the time we were doing *Purgatory Afterglow*, we were thinking of what to do with the next one. I was going for all weird kinds of thinking, like quitting our jobs and making a career out of this, and going more commercial. Then we said fuck this, let's make a one track, forty minute album! We were number one on this very cool list for five weeks in Sweden. We were never even in the top ten with *Purgatory Afterglow*. I don't think any other artist, during the time I got the list every week, was on top for five weeks. You know about the HELLACOPTERS? They were number two all the time. Fuck them! Haha! It might have been a computer error, or I might have gotten the same list five times. It sold pretty good. Even the presales were pretty good. People were so confused, "One track?"

When people ask me what my favorite albums are, I usually put Crimson in there.

Oh, that's nice to hear. You've got taste!

Moving on, let's talk about the thing you're doing with Arjen Lucassen? When did he first get in touch with you on that?

During the summer of 2001. He got a hold of the I album, because I was in Aardschok I think. I was telling them that I liked AYREON. They asked, "Are you going to make a follow-up to *Moontower*?" I said, "No, there's no point, AYREON is doing it all the time. There's nothing to explore in metal with analog keyboards because Arjen already did it and will continue to do it." He read that and was like "Hmm, who is this guy telling all these nice things?" He asked Aardschok to send him albums, and they sent him all the NIGHTINGALE. He liked my deep vocals. He liked the I album songwise. He got in touch and asked "Maybe you would like a spot on the next AYREON album." Yeah man! I think that email must have been even more pathetic than the one I sent to you. After that, we were communicating. We were not getting along, but in a cool way. We were trying out each other. What we liked. I liked this, and he hated that. Then he liked this, but I hated that. We were totally opposites. These emails were like "You're disappointing me, how can you do that?" We had a lot of things in common, but in other things we were totally opposite. He reminds me a bit of my brother, they're the same age. I'm used to dealing with people like that. Then he says "This thing I was working on with Bruce [Dickinson] didn't work out." Some conflict, some web thing, I don't know what it was. [Arjen revealed the plans for the next Dickinson solo album on his yahoo groups list and it made widespread news and Bruce and management used that as an excuse to not go on with him- ed] He asked if I wanted to be a part of that. I said "If it means me doing something with you, then yes!" We got these demos of the parts we were supposed to sing on CD. I brought it with me to Atlanta, I got it just a few days before we left. I listened to it a little bit, and then I got the lyrics, and I did a little bit of pre-

production. I went to Holland to where he lives, and we nailed all the songs on Friday and Saturday. I did tons of vocal harmonies, tons of dubbing, and I'm extremely satisfied with the results. It's the best vocal performance I've ever done. It's great songs. I think people absolutely love it. I get to make some vocal duels with Russell [Allen] from SYMPHONY X. Not too bad. It was all great. Eight cats, nice wife, I had my own flat, I just loved it.

Did you say hi to Russell when you were both in Atlanta?

Yeah, it was very pathetic. I was talking to this girl by the elevator. Just when I told her, "I'm going to Holland when I get home to do this AYREON thing." Just when I say that, Russell Allen is coming around the corner, and it's like he must of thought I said that so he would hear me, because he said "See you there, dude!" and just went in the elevator. Oh, how pathetic is that? I wanted to go to him and say "Hi, we're going to be on the same album," but I never got the chance. He's just running into the elevator and I felt like a stupid asshole. Whatever.

Any idea when that's supposed to be out?

He's mixing it right now, and he's trying for an April release.

What about your relationship with Black Mark right now?

It's like we're divorced and we don't talk. I was actually thinking this very day that I should send them an email and check out how things would be if I quit. I've been thinking about that four years. I'm always thinking "It's always best to have them release the next NIGHTINGALE album than not." But the more I think about it, some of the stuff already written for the next NIGHTINGALE album is far off Black Mark material. The ten minute epic prog rock song is not a Black Mark song. It's a great song, but it will work better with a label that has a few bands like that on the roster. Now they're doing all this nu metal, this KYUSS music. "Yeah, the new trend, stoner rock!" Wake up! "And nu metal, thank you!" Weird label. I don't want to be a part of that scenario where we're releasing albums with a genre that was dead when they signed the band. It's like breaking up with someone, when you've already broken up but now I'm breaking up paperworkwise. I have to be out of the contract. I've got things coming up where it would be very nice to be out of a contract.

As far as that contract goes, how long are you supposed to be under contract?

The contract is already expired. It's down to options. The deal is this. I can send them an email, or call them, and tell them I want to quit. I have to look at my contract, it's here somewhere. It's either three months from the date, and if the date is after some period, if I call them between January and March, I'm out in July. If I call them in April, I'm out in July the next year. It's a weird thing. If I tell them three months prior to a certain date, I'm out three months later. I hope I will get out easily. I was the first artist to be signed to that label...

Before BATHORY?

Not really. BATHORY was never signed to Black Mark at first. He signed them to Noise Records and then they were releasing records together. Black Mark was a phony name, as a business we were the first band to get signed. Then they re-released albums with OZ, from Finland. We were the fresh band, and we had to suffer through weird contracts.

<tape runs out, and by the time I notice Dan's onto something else...>

I've heard a couple of those bands. "We're inspired by OPEETH, and we don't have any structure!" Fuck you. There's so much structure in those songs it's scary. They just happen to put riff after riff after riff, it doesn't mean it doesn't have any structure. Listen to classical, there's not fucking chorus. But it's got structure.

Have you heard the band APRIL ETHEREAL?

Nope.

They released their first album a few months ago called Advent.

Oh man. I just found the CDs I was listening to when I was moving. LILITU *Memorial*, SATAN'S PENGUINS *Birds of Darkness*, that's pretty funny, the new THE

MISSION, the FIFTH REASON, *The Somberlain*, and the DIXIE CHICKS! And that was not good. That's my pile. I have so many CDs here, they're all over the place. Since we moved, there's no alphabetical order. CDs all over the place. The cool thing is when you're searching for CDs that aren't in alphabetical order, you find other CDs you want to listen to. Normally, you know it's in 'that' area, and now you have to search all the albums. It can be anywhere! But then you find albums you haven't listened to for ten years. Where were you?

You were one of the first guys to do both harsh vocals and clean vocals. I was just going to run down a bit of a list here of singers that do that too. Heard new AMORPHIS?

Not really new, but the one where it doesn't sound like a dog singing. <makes growling noise>

The newer guy, Pasi Koskinen.

I like his voice. I listened a lot to that one album, it was the one, *Elegy*. That's the one. Against Widows. I like it. I liked it very much. I didn't listen to it enough to realize they had a lot of the old keyboards on it. I got a lot of reviews, "*Moontower* is AMORPHIS-alike." What? AMORPHIS, fuck off! Then I listen to it and it's Hammonds and Moogs and shit. It's good!

What about Vintersorg?

It's not too bad really. Someone played it to me. It's a bit, I know his kind of vocals. It's over-something. It doesn't sound natural. It's a special way of singing, a type of folk music in Sweden, kind of singing. He's got a good voice, a good tone. I don't know, there's something about it that I don't like. It's not that I think he can't sing, it's just something about it that doesn't get to me.

The MY DYING BRIDE guy, Aaron Stainthorpe.

He's OK. I think he's really good at this anguish, this really sorrowful... I've heard some stuff, *Light at the End of the Day*, the one before the last one. That's got a lot of good moments. My wife listened to that a lot. I like him. He's not my favorite, I don't want him to join MARILLION or anything, but it's a good vocal for that kind of music. He's competent. Fits the music very well.

You did it for years, screaming your head off on one hand and then doing melodic vocals on the other, how does the screaming affect your normal singing voice?

Kills it. Totally. They're not related. I envy people like Mike that can do both. Even on *Orchid*, he was doing it all the same in one take. There's one track on *Orchid* where he's doing a lot of growling and then he's just "Gazing into the stars, please..." [He's singing to me now. Help- ed] He just stopped growling and started singing clean. Whoops! What happened here? He just went "ROAR! Lala!" I had to wait two weeks between the growling and the clean. He went two seconds. Ever since, it was like "You fuck!" I officially quit growling. The last growling I did was on the BLOODBATH. I did like one line and I had a sore throat for a week. My body forgot years ago that I'd ever done any growling. The cool thing is I'm doing the BLOODBATH demos here in my workshop, and I'm whispering into this really fancy microphone with this really fancy equipment. It's brutal as fuck! I sound like David Vincent! It turns out to be the most evil death metal vocals ever, it's really cool. I'm thinking of putting together something. I don't mind growling vocals, but I mind the ache in my throat. If it's OK just whispering, then I can do any death metal album you want. The BLOODBATH songs are turning out so amazing. The album is going to be ready maybe in March, and we'll be out shopping for the best possible deal.

Is that going to be like early 90s...

It's going to be the best death metal recorded...

Really.

... in this room. It's going to be really good. My songs are really competent death metal tracks. It's going to be a tribute to the scene around 1991. BLOODBATH was supposed to be a total scam. I had the idea that we were supposed to be a band from Stockholm in 91 who released a cassette with phony names, and just spread it in the underground. It would be recorded in a phony tracks list we made with all the phony bands and the comments. Like "Thanks to all these imaginary bands (Nice car dude!)" We were laughing our heads off! I remember

laughing so hard my stomach was aching for days after! Then I erased it. We had to do it one more time, that's when it got serious. If we should do it again, maybe we should do something a bit more serious. STEEL was pretty much the same league. It was a death metal STEEL. Then it was sign this, release that, and then fuck, let's just do it. BLOODBATH came out and was a great success. It's going to be a clash between the Swedish metal, you will hear my songs are my songs. Kind of an *Unorthodox* kind of style. A bit more brutal. The other guys' tracks are going to be classic death as we liked it. We're trying to focus on what made us like death metal so much that we dedicated ten years of our lives to the genre. Dead on, this is the stuff. The heavy, the big parts. The atmospheric leads. The massive chunking tuned down guitars. The powerful, very audible death metal vocals with good pronunciation. Dark lyrics. We're trying to make a feel good death metal album that any death metal fan can put it on and be like "Yeah! This is it!" If you want to listen to death metal in one package, we'll have it all covered here. No black metal, no corpsepaint, no penguins, just dead on death metal, 90s style. With the most brutal guitar sound ever recorded. Ever.

That gives you a lot to live up to.

We will. <funny voice> I promise you!

FLESHCRAWL just released their new album on Metal Blade a few weeks ago, and that's complete ENTOMBED and DISMEMBER kind of stuff.

They've always been. I recorded them once.

I guess it's a little more special now since there's not ten billion bands doing it.

We have more quality than them, I promise you. We're outside looking in. They're really inside not even looking out. Confused Germans.

If you want to have some fun, track down their cover of JUDAS PRIEST's Metal Gods.

Oh no. I think the guys from SIX FEET UNDER did all these tracks. It was horrible.

There needs to be some kind of prison for people that put out these cover songs.

I should go there for my SLAYER cover with EDGE OF SANITY. Fucking be hanging there upside down! I'm one of the few people who never heard Criminally Insane before I sung it. I didn't know I played every note wrong. What did I care? It was a SLAYER tribute, and it had good sales. Everyone was like "Your version sucks!" I said "I didn't produce it, I just went there and sang it." I never heard the original. Don't blame me! I once owned *Reign in Blood* for twenty minutes on a picture disc. I found out it was extremely rare, so I sold it. I've heard it in a car. I've heard Angel of Death because it's the first track, you maintain focus. But Criminally Insane, it's like way on the album. I just never listened to it. It was too raw. No melody, no harmony. *South of Heaven* was more balanced. That got me into this genre in the first place. That and WEHRMACHT. A weird American band. They did an album called *Biermächte*, with songs like You Broke My Heart (So I Broke Your Face), Suck My Dick, and all these weird songs. I liked the humor, those titles. The drummer's extremely good. He's doing a lot of cowbell. So I thought "Yeah, he's really fast, I want to play fast!" So I joined BRAINDEAD because I wanted to start playing fast. The music was crap but I played fast. Then I heard *South of Heaven*. The first song, I was like "When are they going to destroy this one with crap?" It never happened! It was a good song. Then I saw they made a JUDAS PRIEST cover, good taste! The second song, Silent Scream, wow, this guy knows how to play, just like the guy in WEHRMACHT. I borrowed the album just to analyze Dave Lombardo. And I ended up liking it! I thought, "Wait a minute. I'm an AOR guy here. This is thrash metal. This is anti! No no no!" But I couldn't stop liking it so then I borrowed some Speed Kills. Then you had the BATHORY and the DARK ANGEL, and I was hooked. "This is not happening, but I'm enjoying death and thrash metal here!" Then I bought an American band called RECIPIENTS OF DEATH from Wild Rags. They were the biggest SLAYER ripoff, and I liked them! When I heard more SLAYER albums, I said, "They sound like RECIPIENTS OF DEATH!" Oh no. That's the other way around. "No, I have an album at

home that sounds just like *Hell Awaits!*" Then they told me. SLAYER never did it for me in the big sense. The vocals are not brutal enough, or melodic enough. I prefer like FORBIDDEN when it comes to thrash. Good vocals and good power. TESTAMENT was also OK.

Well I think a good place to finish up this monster would be for you to plug Spam Records.

I've always had this record company. I used to release tapes. I did all the EDGE OF SANITY demos. I've always this direct communication with the ones listening. I've never enjoyed the word 'record label' or 'distributor' if you're the artist. There's too many people in the way of your vision. I really enjoy selling directly. Some of the stuff, "I'm shifting some serious copies here!" It's like ten copies. And I'm like "Yeah!" My biggest seller must be the UNICORN box set, 44 copies, yeah! I think I did pretty well, shifting 20 ROUTE NINE albums. I'm happy! If I have to print 300, then I have to really care about it all the time. Now, "ROUTE NINE, that's a good one!" I master it, do the cover, end of story. "One ROUTE NINE order, pack it." If you have 300 copies, you have to sell it to the record store, sell it to Century Media mail order. I want it to be available from me. I make the copies as I get the orders. That's the way it works. I do the UNICORN stuff, and hopefully I will find even more goodies. I went through my DATs and found some really cool stuff. I'm probably going to put together compilations. People that are into what I'm doing, they should hear everything. They should hear me when I'm five. At least picture what I've been doing. All the weird tracks with Tony the ABRUPTU guy. I'm going to put out some collection of stuff. There's really no other full length material available. I've got the SUBWAY MIRROR, maybe 15 copies. The *Dawn* demo from PAN-THY-MONIUM, it was something that was too short I think to be able to be released, nine minutes I think. But it's cool for people to complete the PAN-THY-MONIUM collection. I feel that I'm doing something that's really nice. You send money, I send you the CDs direct. If they're into my stuff, they should not have to be paying for any other things than the raw materials from me. They shouldn't have to be paying for the advertising, the paycheck for someone at the warehouse. The money I make, the covers are pretty expensive to print, they cost me almost a dollar each. That's the way it is around here. I do it because I like it. As soon as it's boring, or I feel I don't have anything interesting to offer, I will quit. That's the way it is. No one is complaining!

We're at just about the four and a half hour mark, and that's all the questions I have. Any final words for the readers?

The classic thank you to you, and the ones who read this. I think they should have a great thank you for putting up with all the words. And I think right now there's a lot of plans that I'm making. Every time I say I'm going to focus on the SECOND SKY project, then everything else happens and nothing happens with SECOND SKY! But I've got NIGHTINGALE, BLOODBATH, I would like to do the KARABOUDJAN, I have other projects, the MEMORY GARDEN album is a big one. I'm recording this vocal Bruce Springsteen thing this Saturday for studio hours to do the NIGHTINGALE album. I'm doing a lot of stuff here. There's a lot of things at work, we changed the computer system so I'm working my ass off, 22 hour workdays, stuff like that. My life is pretty packed. We moved, kid's going to a new school. People should check out my webpage. I will keep a look out on the Ultimate Metal board and post some news there.

(Very Select) Discography

With NIGHTINGALE:

The Breathing Shadow (1995 Black Mark)

The Closing Chronicles (1996 Black Mark)

I (2000 Black Mark)

As DAN SWANÖ:

Moontower (1998 Black Mark)

With EDGE OF SANITY:

Nothing But Death Remains (1991 Black Mark)

Unorthodox (1992 Black Mark)

The Spectral Sorrows (1993 Black Mark)

Until Eternity Ends (1994 Black Mark)

Purgatory Afterglow (1994 Black Mark)

Crimson (1996 Black Mark)

Infernal (1997 Black Mark)

*Cryptic** (1997 Black Mark)

Evolution (2000 Black Mark)

With PAN-THY-MONIUM:

Dream II (1991 Avantgarde, reissued 1994)

Dawn of Dreams (1992 Osmose, reissued 2001)

Khaooohs (1993 Osmose, reissued 2001)

Khaooohs and Kon-Fus-Ion (1996 Relapse)

With GODSEND:

As the Shadows Fall (1993 Holy)

*In the Electric Mist** (1995 Holy)

A Wayfarer's Tears (1997 Holy)

With UNICORN:

Ever Since (1993 Mellow)

Emotional Wasteland (1995 Mellow)

With DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE:

*Ravendusk In My Heart*** (1996 Adipocere)

*The Phantom Lodge*** (1997 Adipocere)

Nightwork (1998 Avantgarde)

Death's Design (2001 Avantgarde/Olympic)

Assorted Various Projects:

BLOODBATH *Breeding Death* (2000 Century Media)

ODYSSEY *Odyssey* (1998 Utopian Vision)

STEEL *Heavy Metal Machine 7"* (1998 Near Dark)

KARABOUDJAN *Karaboudjian* (2001 Relapse)

* Albums listed for completeness, Swanö is not on these albums

** Swanö produces and has short guest appearance
Also check out releases on Spam Records at Swanö's site

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www.blackmark.net

www.avantgardemusic.com

www.osmoseproductions.com

www.relapse.com

www.mellowrecords.com

www.centurymedia.com

*** **

This double issue counts as two issues on your subscription. Apologies on not having the January 29 issue out as planned, but a trip for family business proved not to be as productive an environment as I'd hoped. We're back on schedule here now, and next week will have the letters and additional news items (including breaking down the hissy fit IN FLAMES put out as a public statement last week) that have piled up the last couple weeks that need to be dealt with.

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New This Week

KING DIAMOND *Abigail II: The Revenge*
13- 53:09

KING DIAMOND's attempt to regain former glories by continuing the storyline of one of his most famous albums is both a success and a failure. A success in that *Abigail II* is a good album. A failure in that it doesn't match up to any of the albums from *Abigail* through *The Eye*. It is a higher energy album, with not so many slower songs so though liking the early DIAMOND hhhheeaavvyyy mmeettaa!!! will like this for sure. Interesting heavy metal songs with not much of a nod to the modern, this is KING DIAMOND the way he's been known for quite some time, although he's well out of those *Spider's Lullabye/Graveyard* doldrums. Not much to say that could really tell you all sorts of interesting things as you should know what to expect stylistically, and if you don't, then a purchase of *Abigail* and/or *Them* is mandatory, right now! King's voice is an interesting... thing. He's staying mostly in his deeper areas these days, still hitting higher notes and some lines, but if you directly compare his current vocal work to what he did 'back in the day', you'll notice he's not singing and staying up in those upper registers like he used to. Good for him, it must be hell singing those old songs live, and he doesn't need the latest set killing him too. The only reason I make all these direct comparisons to 15 years ago is that the hype is all over the place that this is a return to the quality of old. We've heard that every single album, and it's just not true. The King was a first rate artist in the 80s. In the 90s and now in the 00s, he's not the cream of the crop, and neither are the album's he's releasing. Not to say he's useless, not to say he's useless, not to say he's washed up, and not to say you shouldn't buy this. But buy with confidence that you know what you're getting, and not what the hype is telling you you'll be getting. And this is not me being nostalgic, I only got the classic DIAMOND albums a few years ago- AFTER I got Voodoo, so I think I'm looking at the comparative quality of the albums somewhat objectively. I think I might know why that is. The credit show 'Diamond/Diamond' nine times, and 'LaRocque/Diamond' three times, plus one non-song. They've got Mike Wead on guitar here and he does nothing outside of a couple solos. They've got a rhythm section that might as well be trained monkeys. King and Andy live on separate continents, and the credits would indicate no musical collaboration on their songs. King's not shared very many songwriting credits over the years, which means 18 albums by my count total of this writing style, much with all the same themes musically since 1983. EIGHTEEN! I suggest he needs to lock himself in a room with someone, anyone, and write with them, tear each others' hair out, and bang out something that really breaks the barriers of what he's done, because King Diamond really deserves to release something in modern times that is every bit as good, as shocking, and as definitive

as his 80s work, and the 80s become ancient history more and more every day. Just something to think about. So anyway, the packaging is quite cool, with a Travis Smith cover worth writing home about. The band photos show a band more serious looking than the original *Abigail* shots, I mean King's not wearing a damned cape, even if he's got that ridiculous makeup on with all the upside crosses. Geek of the week award goes to Hal Patino, who is wearing one of those top hats, paleface makeup, all sorts of jewelry, and a band shirt. Come on man, even I have more fashion sense than that. Question of the day: Of the Roadrunner remasters of all the old KING DIAMOND albums, why is *Conspiracy* the only title on the spine in white instead of yellow? OK, enough of the pointless observations, bottom line on *Abigail II* is that it is quite the good album that should be enjoyed, but compares more to Voodoo than the 80s material, so I don't think there's much of a problem here... www.covenworldwide.com

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SINERGY *Suicide By My Side*

10- 38:15 Nuclear Blast

SINERGY's third album is not crap. Dunno about their second one, never heard it, but their debut *Beware the Heavens* was one of the worst albums I'd ever heard, so I was quite surprised to hear creativity right out of the gate on opener *I Spit On Your Grave*. The song begins at a point where it just sounds like they should be coming out of a solo break, high energy and not a 'buildup' kind of thing, showcasing that the album's not going to just limp along. This heavy/power metal formula works for them, even if they are not blowing me away or anything. The buildup into *Me, Myself, My Enemy* is pretty clever and clever's a difficult commodity these days. Singer Kimberly Goss puts in an OK performance as the mean 'rock grrl', and she's no longer offensive to the ears, but there's not a lot of power here. But she's trying, bless her heart. The best song here is obviously *Shadow Island*, which isn't build like anything else to be found here, features lots of solo parts, choir singing, and a tradeoff between Kimberly and a growly vocalist (her mate and guitar player Alexi Laiho, perhaps?). It's thinking outside the box of what a band like this 'should' sound like, but at the same time I fear too much of this thinking would pull towards TRISTANIA which isn't what this band needs either. Anyway, the packaging is kind of misrepresenting, as the whole 'suicide' noose anguished guy on the cover doesn't match the more rocking vibe of the music, and the dreadful promotional photos of Kimberly in her best 80s glam zebra jacket and ridiculous hat didn't put me in the proper frame of mind for anything serious either. In terms of general genre importance, SINERGY is nowhere near essential, it's pretty average all around with some high spikes and low pits, but in terms of a band improving, has there ever been any better? www.sinergy.org

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TIDFALL *Instinct Gate*

8- 42:09 Nuclear Blast

This is the album that never ends, it just goes on and on my friends... To say TIDFALL sucks wouldn't be entirely accurate because the CD sounds good and competent. To say they are unoriginal would be accurate. To say this album was boring to the degree that this is the longest 42 minute album I've ever heard just might be accurate as well. The band itself is a DIMMU BORGIR styled band, using all the meat and potatoes DIMMU methods of their past three albums, but containing absolutely none of the highlights and frills that go along with BORGIR. Very modern production that flirts with the whole MYRKSKOG sound, and there are two brief techno parts on the album, including the intro. The vocals are monotonous 'extreme' crap, with little in the way of audible emotion, effective arrangement, or any indication that the guy even gives a shit. That's about all I have to say here. Well, maybe not. Let me get this straight. HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE aren't signed, but this band has a Nuclear Blast record contract? Yeah, this industry makes no sense. The only really positive I have to say is they don't wear corpsepaint, and it was a bit imaginative to have an X-ray of Voldemoort from the end of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone as the cover art. www.tidfall.net

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WARMEN *Beyond Abilities*

11- 46:34 Spinefarm/Century Media

WARMEN is the solo project of CHILDREN OF BODOM keyboard player Janne Warman, featuring instrumentals and such, with vocals on five of the eleven songs, provided by STRATOVARIUS' Timo Kotipelto. SINERGY's Kimberly Goss, and a growler named Pasi Nykanen (no clue). *Beyond Abilities* is the second album of the project. They do a cover of HEART's *Alone*, which of course Kimberly sings on, and this should just be a nice little sideshow, but of course they made it the single. Samples introing songs here and there (and on the SINERGY album too, to think of it) remind me of how BODOM does things. Kotipelto's songs sound just like STRATOVARIUS songs, including one embarrassing as hell set of lyrics in Singer's *Chance*, about being on stage, and *Salieri Strikes Back* sounds half like the GOBLIN song RHAPSODY just covered, although I wouldn't doubt if GOBLIN ripped those keyboard runs off of some composer (such as, maybe, Antonio Salieri?) and nobody knew? Anyway, there's not a lot of shredding on the album, and I guess the kudos go to Janne for making a song-based solo project. It's OK, I could take it or leave it. Doesn't match up to the VITALIJ KUPRIJ releases (the only other keys solo project I've heard). Of all the things on Spinefarm to get a US release though... www.warmen.net

LAMENTATIONS OF THE FLAME PRINCES

WEEKLY

LotFP Weekly #17 February 12, 2002

"Paul Baloff, vocalist for the legendary thrash band EXODUS, passed away shortly before noon on Saturday, February 2, 2002 at a hospital in Oakland, California. Baloff suffered a massive stroke on Thursday night that left him comatose with irreparable brain damage. He was 41. Baloff made a monumental impact on the metal world through his work with EXODUS, which includes their seminal thrash debut, *Bonded By Blood*, which was released in 1985. While some of their contemporaries like METALLICA and MEGADETH were writing some (relatively) down-tempo songs, *Bonded* is a paramount achievement of high-energy, high-speed metal that is cited as an influence by bands across the heavy music spectrum. "Paul loved EXODUS, WAS EXODUS, and we loved him for it and in spite of it," said EXODUS guitarist Gary Holt in a statement issued following Baloff's death. "His flame burned bright, so bright in fact that in hindsight it was all but impossible to have burned forever. Still, it burns in us and we must never let that flame burn out, lest Paul's legacy and his contribution be forgotten." EXODUS was born in 1981 when Baloff, guitarists Holt and Kirk Hammett, bassist Geoff Andrews, and drummer Tom Hunting fused their passion for N.W.O.B.H.M. (New Wave Of British Heavy Metal) with the raw energy and spirit of the punk scene that was dominating the Bay Area music scene at the time. Their demos and explosive live performances established EXODUS as one of the forefathers of thrash, along with METALLICA, SLAYER, VENOM and MEGADETH. In fact, METALLICA was so impressed with Hammett's performance with EXODUS that they asked him to join the band after Dave Mustaine's departure. Baloff left EXODUS after *Bonded*, but the band continued to record throughout the 80s and 90s. While the band enjoyed substantial sales and were ultimately signed to Capitol Records (for which they released two albums), most fans hold *Bonded* as their masterpiece. In March of 1997, Baloff re-joined the band for a sold-out reunion show in San Francisco for which they performed the bulk of *Bonded*, as well as the previously unreleased *Impaler*, which Holt and Hammett had co-written in the early days of the band. The show was recorded and released under the title *Another Lesson In Violence* by Century Media Records later that year, prompting a worldwide tour. "I am extremely saddened to hear about the loss of another forefather of the metal scene," said Marco Barbieri, Vice President and General Manager of Century Media's North American operations. "Paul Baloff was a unique character and his demented vocal attack and violent lyrics helped fuel my own teenage days. While Paul was an inspiration from my own fans' perspective, I was also fortunate enough to be involved professionally in EXODUS' reissues, live album and the ensuing tours which gave us all the chance to bang our heads against the stage one more time. Your physical presence may be gone from this earth but your impact to heavy music and our fond memories will live forever!" Baloff had been an instrumental part of a recent surge of activity for EXODUS, which included a string of West Coast dates and a scheduled appearance at the upcoming New Jersey Metal Meltdown in April. The band has reportedly been writing material for a new studio album, which would have been Baloff's first studio vocal collaboration with EXODUS since *Bonded*. EXODUS will attempt to perform all scheduled dates with Steve "Zetro" Souza, the singer who replaced Baloff after *Bonded*, and is working to establish a fund in Baloff's name."

It's not often that I'll spend an hour writing something and then scrap it because an official press release says it all better, but there it is, Century Media's official statement on the death of Paul Baloff: And *Bonded By Blood* is indeed the only EXODUS album that matters.

**** **

DREAM THEATER released *Six Degrees of Inner Turbulence* was released January 29 to great success. Not only did it hit #46 on Billboard's sales charts, but it was #1 on CDNow's charts, with the re-release of *When Dream and Day Unite* being #2 there. That IS great, but to put things into a little bit of perspective, here's a contribution by Sami-Pekka Haavisto:

After everyone has been talking about chart positions of DREAM THEATER I threw together some quick scripts to parse Finnish album chart archives, this has interested me for quite a long time anyway. Everyone knows Finland is a metal country, a small country, but at least metal is still alive and well somewhere. Many especially Finnish metal bands actually get much mainstream media attention, well explaining high chart positions. Bands like STRATOVARIUS, NIGHTWISH, SENTENCED, AMORPHIS and CHILDREN OF BODOM are frequently featured on national TV and radio when new material is released. I first heard about STRATOVARIUS on national TV in 1995 when *Fourth Dimension* was released, though it was still before their big break. Even DREAM THEATER is every now and then well visible, they played an acoustic set on national radio back in 1995, and have been interviewed on some national media for every release since. Here are some bands that might interest, and some nu-metal in comparison, and their peak positions on the official Finnish top 40 album chart. With many bands it's pretty easy to see when they actually got mainstream acceptance. Though NIGHTWISH is now big in Finland, their debut album was almost obscure when originally released with only 500 copies or so. STRATOVARIUS barely entered the charts until they had already sold gold in Japan in 1996. The archives start from Summer 1995, and 5/2002 [The dates are which week of the year the album was released, so AMORPHIS' *Elegy* was released the 22nd week in 1996, for example. Also keep in mind that these lists don't address longevity on the Finnish charts. I'll bet DREAM THEATER has little longevity on the US charts.- ed] is the current chart. The chart is based on actual numbers sold, though many smaller and more specialized record stores (like my usual) are not counted. If everything was counted all this marginal stuff would probably get even higher.

AMORPHIS

- #8 *Elegy* (22/1996)
- #8 *Tuonela* (8/1999)
- #34 *Story* (10th Year Anniversary) (48/2000)
- #4 *Am Universum* (9/2001)

ANATHEMA

- #34 *A Fine Day To Exit* (40/2001)

APOCALYPTICA

- #7 *Apocalyptic Plays Metallica By Four Cellos* (22/1996)
- #10 *Inquisition Symphony* (16/1998)
- #15 *Cult* (41/2000)

AVANTASIA

- #36 *The Metal Opera* (6/2001)

BRUCE DICKINSON

- #14 *Skunkworks* (10/1996)
- #13 *Accident Of Birth* (22/1997)
- #22 *The Chemical Wedding* (38/1998)

- #6 *The Best Of* (39/2001)

CHILDREN OF BODOM

- #20 *Something Wild* (4/1998)
- #6 *Hatebreeder* (9/1999)
- #33 *Tokyo Warhearts Live In Japan* (41/1999)
- #3 *Follow The Reaper* (44/2000)

DIMMU BORGIR

- #26 *Enthroned Darkness Triumphant* (32/1997)
- #25 *Godless Savage Garden* (30/1998)
- #14 *Spiritual Black Dimensions* (10/1999)
- #11 *Puritanical Euphoric Misanthropy* (11/2001)

DIO

- #40 *Dio's Inferno - The Last In Live* (10/1998)
- #26 *Magica* (12/2000)

DREAM THEATER

- #17 *A Change Of Seasons* (39/1995)
- #5 *Falling Into Infinity* (39/1997)
- #6 *Scenes From A Memory* (43/1999)
- #2 *Six Degrees Of Inner Turbulence* (5/2002)

FINNTROLL

- #20 *Jaktens Tid* (8/2001)

FREEDOM CALL

- #35 *Crystal Empire* (6/2001)

GAMMA RAY

- #17 *Somewhere Out In Space* (37/1997)
- #32 *Powerplant* (14/1999)
- #19 *No World Order* (37/2001)

THE GATHERING

- #32 *Nighttime Birds* (25/1997)

HAMMERFALL

- #34 *Renegade* (43/2000)

HELLOWEEN

- #14 *The Time Of The Oath* (11/1996)
- #23 *High Live* (42/1996)
- #7 *Better Than Raw* (16/1998)
- #31 *Metal Jukebox* (39/1999)
- #19 *The Dark Ride* (45/2000)

HIM

- #4 *Greatest Lovesongs Vol.666* (46/1997)
- #1 *Razorblade Romance* (4/2000)
- #1 *Deep Shadows & Brilliant Highlights* (35/2001)

IN FLAMES

- #33 *Whoracle* (45/1997)
- #27 *Colony* (24/1999)
- #20 *Clayman* (29/2000)
- #31 *Tokyo Showdown - Live In Japan 2000* (31/2001)

IRON MAIDEN

- #2 *The X Factor* (41/1995)
- #8 *Best Of The Beast* (41/1996)
- #6 *Virtual XI* (13/1998)
- #27 *Ed Hunter* (21/1999)
- #2 *Brave New World* (22/2000)

KING DIAMOND

- #23 *The Graveyard* (41/1996)
- #27 *Voodoo* (12/1998)

KORN

#24 *Life Is Peachy* (43/1996)
#4 *Follow The Leader* (34/1998)
#4 *Issues* (46/1999)

LIMP BIZKIT

#16 *Significant Other* (35/2000)
#2 *Chocolate Starfish & The Hot Dog Flavored Water* (42/2000)
#22 *New Old Songs* (1/2002)

LINKIN PARK

#4 *Hybrid Theory* (43/2001)

MANOWAR

#11 *Louder Than Hell* (41/1996)

MEGADETH

#2 *Cryptic Writings* (24/1997)
#8 *Risk* (35/1999)
#23 *The World Needs A Hero* (20/2001)

MERCYFUL FATE

#31 *Into The Unknown* (37/1996)

NIGHTWISH

#31 *Angels Fall First* (5/1998)
#5 *Oceanborn* (4/1999)
#1 *Wishmaster* (20/2000)
#7 *From Wishes To Eternity - Live* (12/2001)

OZZY OSBOURNE

#9 *Ozzmosis* (44/1995)
#20 *The Ozzman Cometh* (46/1997)
#9 *Down To Earth* (42/2001)

PARADISE LOST

#7 *One Second* (30/1997)
#7 *Host* (21/1999)
#18 *Believe In Nothing* (9/2001)

QUEENSRÿCHE

#18 *Hear In The Now Frontier* (13/1997)

RHAPSODY

#39 *Dawn Of Victory* (44/2000)

RUSH

#9 *Test For Echo* (38/1996)

SENTENCED

#14 *Down* (50/1996)
#7 *Story* (32/1997)
#3 *Frozen* (34/1998)
#1 *Crimson* (3/2000)

SEPULTURA

#5 *Roots* (9/1996)
#38 *Against* (41/1998)

SINERGY

#29 *To Hell And Back* (28/2000)
#11 *Suicide By My Side* (3/2002)

SLAYER

#27 *Undisputed Attitude* (22/1996)
#18 *Diabolus In Musica* (25/1998)
#12 *God Hates Us All* (37/2001)

SONATA ARCTICA

#18 *Ecliptica* (2/2000)
#3 *Silence* (29/2001)

STRATOVARIUS

#21 *Episode* (19/1996)
#4 *Visions* (19/1997)
#6 *Visions Of Europe* (10/1998)
#1 *Destiny* (41/1998)
#7 *The Chosen Ones* (45/1999)
#1 *Infinite* (08/2000)
#7 *Intermission* (25/2001)

SYMPHONY X

#37 *Twilight In Olympus* (14/1998)

TAROT

#19 *For The Glory Of Nothing* (7/1998)

TIMO TOLKKI

#38 *Hymn To Life* (4/2002)

TOOL

#11 *Lateralus* (20/2001)

WALTARI

#7 *Big Bang* (39/1995)
#23 *Yeah! Yeah! Die! Die! Death Metal Symphony In Deep C* (29/1996)
#5 *Space Avenue* (15/1997)
#33 *Radium Round* (40/1999)

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

#11 *Magnum Opus* (36/1995)
#16 *Inspiration* (42/1996)
#20 *Facing The Animal* (8/1998)

*** **

A couple weeks ago, IN FLAMES released the following statement through their webmaster on their official web forum:

“We have just completed a kick-ass pre-production of our forthcoming album.

We are very proud of it and we hope that everyone out there is going to appreciate it as much as we do. It might be safe to say that anyone who is ignorant enough to expect a conservative and undeveloped sound shouldn't bother to come out of their shell. We feel really connected to our fans that can relate to us and our music and we think it's awesome that you guys still get it and are able to move forward with us. It's really sad that some people have so much time on their hands and have such disillusioned ideas about reality that they can sit and complain to those that are successful in doing what they love. It's even more alarming that some people, probably a very small minority of you, think that following and appreciating a band involves forming that band. HELLO? If we don't like what another band does, we don't buy the album. What we would not do is lose our heads and sit in an old T-shirt that mom washes and be naïve enough to think we were superior and that we could reach anybody by whining.

Another news flash for the clueless! If you claim to be so loyal and all-knowing then you would know that we have toured a million times with bands like CHILDREN OF BODOM, DARK TRANQUILLITY, ARCH ENEMY and so on. Where were you then? And who the hell said we will never tour with bands like that again? If there was anything you could ask of us it is to not stagnate, which is what we would do if we didn't mingle with other bands, be opened-minded and filter new impressions. Please observe that this does NOT mean that we will sound like another band. It's a bit ridiculous that when we released *Clayman*, no one ever mentioned nu-metal and suddenly we are perceived as just that. We haven't changed a thing since then so all this new labeling shit is really uncalled for. We haven't even toured with SLIPKNOT yet and some of you guys are shitting your pants because this is somehow very threatening to you. An advice to those few of you who feel that way is to try to be comfortable with your own identity instead of trying to cling onto symbols that supposedly will grant you some credibility in isolated groups. Wear whatever the hell you want but keep your fashion rules to yourselves unless you want to be a designer. We never got into this business for the sake of distancing us from something else. We do what we do because we love it. It's contradicting to disassociate yourself from something that you see as 'normal' or mainstream and then be part of a click where everyone has to follow the same made-up rules and conventions anyway!! This is called hypocrisy. We are self-confident enough to explore our own style and not be tied to any one's rules or fall victims of any peer pressure. We were hoping that would make you proud. It makes us sad that some haven't understood that originality is daring to

choose your own paths and not belong to a barricaded category.

Some of you need to realize that you are acting exactly like the people you are trying to rebel against. Like your old folks saying to you: “Turn that noise off sonny, it's repulsive!” Or like the people in the street snaring at your black, torn outfit with a really scary monster on it: “Poor boy, he doesn't know he looks like an idiot”. You are being just as lame when you diss others' preferences. It's so ironic! Have some insight and try not to be exactly like the ones you despise. Seems like you don't know what you are going to do if you were associated with something that didn't make your grandma turn over in her grave. Grow up!

The aim of the forum is for fans to meet, share experiences and come with creative ideas. It's not like we're afraid of criticism, we visit our site every day to see what's up, but there is a difference between bitchin' and being constructive. Reflect on relevancy before you make a statement because we can do without elitist minded people. No one has exclusive ownership of any band so abandon that idea.

We deserve every chance we can get because we have struggled to get this far so why would you even want us to stop now? Man, it's not like you guys still play in the sandbox although you did that when you were five. Or do you...? If you do, that's your prerogative. Good luck in the future!

For those of you who have your own lives:

We love you guys and we look forward to seeing you soon!

We have a great year to look forward to!

IN FLAMES - Anders, Björn, Daniel, Jesper & Peter”

Wow. The simple fact is that IN FLAMES is a band that's been changing, and can't deal with the fact that some of their older fans, or maybe more than some if they thought this statement was a good idea, just don't like the new direction. A band that is confident in what they're doing and confident in their ability to reach their fans will say something to the effect of “We've done pre-production on our new album, and those who liked what we did on *Clayman* will love the new stuff,” or whatever comparison they care to make, thank the fans for their support, and move on. Instead, they attack the very fans who built their reputation for them, the ones who gave them their ability to springboard to a wider audience with *Clayman*. Didn't acknowledge that maybe fans of *Lunar Strain* or *Jester Race* genuinely don't like what's going on, but make statements like “...anyone who is ignorant enough to expect a conservative and undeveloped sound shouldn't bother to come out of their shell.” Who are they, fucking ULVER all of a sudden? Raise your hand if you consider *The Jester Race* conservative or undeveloped? If anything, I consider *Clayman* to be the most underdeveloped IN FLAMES album of all because they chintz out of so much of the clean guitar playing that characterized their earlier material (makes it harder to be tight live without reverbed distortion coming through them club amps, eh?), have Anders Friden singing clean when he can't carry a tune, and have simplified the song structures like never before.

But enough of that. I'm one of those weasely bastards IN FLAMES is bitching about here, so this needs to be addressed. Let's take some of their other statements and see if we can tell what they think of us.

“We have just completed a kick-ass pre-production of our forthcoming album.”

This is just me being a dick, but I'd rather they'd have said “We have just completed pre-production for a kick ass forthcoming album.”

“It's really sad that some people have so much time on their hands and have such disillusioned ideas about reality that they can sit and complain to those that are successful in doing what they love.”

Reality check: The complaint is IN FLAMES used to do something I as a listener and a fan loved, and IN FLAMES is longer doing that. I could really give a shit if someone loves what they're doing if I think it isn't any good. And I know full well the difference between "I don't like it" and "It isn't any good." And *Clayman* is not any good in comparison to any previous album.

"It's even more alarming that some people, probably a very small minority of you, think that following and appreciating a band involves forming that band."

Huh? Is this in reference to all of the clones out there? If so, I agree, but this is so far off topic of everything else in this rant that I wonder why it was brought up now?

"If we don't like what another band does, we don't buy the album."

Fair enough. What if you previously loved them before? Does a band that meant much to you going to shit really make you do no more than shrug your shoulders and move on? Doubtful. And you shouldn't. If somebody's *moved* you, it would be inhuman to have no emotional attachment to them, and no emotional attachment if they suddenly changed for the worse.

"What we would not do is lose our heads and sit in an old T-shirt that mom washes and be naïve enough to think we were superior and that we could reach anybody by whining."

So why is IN FLAMES whining about their fans? Or ex-fans, to be precise?

"If there was anything you could ask of us it is to not stagnate, which is what we would do if we didn't mingle with other bands, be opened-minded and filter new impressions."

If there's anybody any fan could ask of a band, it's for them to not be bitchy that they don't retain their old fanbase when the band changes their philosophy towards music. Duh. Note that this sentence here implies that one reason to get around other bands is to not stagnate, and to filter new ideas, which by logic could very well mean they are influenced by bands they are around, and want to hang around other bands specifically to be influenced by them. Then they say:

"Please observe that this does NOT mean that we will sound like another band."

Which is it? Where/why/when are you mingling with other bands and filtering new ideas then?

"It's a bit ridiculous that when we released *Clayman*, no one ever mentioned nu-metal and suddenly we are perceived as just that. We haven't changed a thing since then so all this new labeling shit is really uncalled for."

No one? NO ONE? I did. And then even the people that didn't mind the album saw you live, numerous times in many cases, where you were doing you damndest impression of a nu metal band on stage. Everybody jump! Seriously, IN FLAMES would have to be as dumb as a bag of rocks to not understand the nu metal complaints that they are getting. As much as I'd like to think they are that dumb, truth is they're not. So what are they getting at with this complaint? They can't play both sides of the fence. They can't court the mainstream crowd with their attitude and their music, and stay friendly with the underground, 'metal flows through their veins' fans on any sort of large scale.

"We haven't even toured with SLIPKNOT yet and some of you guys are shitting your pants because this is somehow very threatening to you."

Here's why IN FLAMES can't play on both sides of the fence. And here's why SLIPKNOT is threatening to the

underground metallers, and why they should be seen as threatening to the scene when a band such as IN FLAMES wants on a tour such as this.

Let's put it this way. What do MACHINE HEAD, KITTIE, COAL CHAMBER, KORN, MOTLEY CRUE, SOUNDGARDEN, SLIPKNOT, FEAR FACTORY, ALICE IN CHAINS, and SOULFLY have in common? These are all bands that had strong connections within the metal scene, or were considered metal at their onset, and as they grew in popularity just whizzed by the scene into MTV-land or hardcore, or whatever, and never looked back. I remember all the KORN shirts at underground metal shows in 1994. I remember MACHINE HEAD opening for OBITUARY and NAPALM DEATH that same year. KITTIE may talk about death metal and MAYHEM, but who do they bring on tour with them? Any of these bands, if they just reached out on an opening slot now and again, wouldn't be considered 'outside'. There's a definite schism between 'us' and 'them' in here, and it's not coming from underground metal's side. That hostility is a direct reaction from being shut out of the industry and having our opportunity to belong. It's all business that determines who tours with whom, on an underground level or mainstream level. The problem is, they don't mix. If a band makes the jump, then they're gone. It happened often enough that now we see this 'opportunity' as a kidnapper that's going to take one of ours away from us. Success has been synonymous with betrayal, and it's not our fault.

Then take a look at IRON MAIDEN, SLAYER, METALLICA, PANTERA, BLACK SABBATH, and DREAM THEATER, all big bands on major labels selling big amounts of albums. On their US tours, they aren't supporting the underground either, as they are either bringing in other 'older and established' bands (DIXIE DREGS and QUEENSRYCHE, anyone?), or the hot trendy bands (Ozzfest, anyone?) as their openers.

The only big name exception to this rule seems to be TOOL, who aren't very connected to this scene anyway, but have brought out MESHUGGAH and KING CRIMSON on different swings. MESHUGGAH also opened on an extended SLAYER tour a few years back, but notice how since then they didn't do jack shit, and their label even put cassette samplers in with direct-sales copies of AP magazine. They never did such a thing with anyone else which leads me to believe the whole idea was a flop and could have been the beginning of the end for the Philadelphia office there. When MESHUGGAH comes out with their own album and makes their own headlining tour, it'll be fascinating to see who supports them.

I can only think of MORBID ANGEL as the major label exception, as when they stepped up to a major label for *Covenant* and *Domination*, they still took out bands from the exact same scene they came from. I'd wager those albums sold much more than IN FLAMES does and nobody calls MORBID ANGEL sellouts.

The lesson learned from actually looking at the history of this genre is that fans of underground bands have every reason to worry and be defensive when one of their bands tries to take that next step up, because if they succeed, chances are unbelievably strong they'll leave 'the scene' altogether and not look back. We are defensive because we've been fucked hard once too many times and we're still sore.

In other words, IN FLAMES, you touring with SLIPKNOT is indeed threatening to us.

"An advice to those few of you who feel that way is to try to be comfortable with your own identity instead of trying to cling onto symbols that supposedly will grant you some credibility in isolated groups."

So few of us, that you make the statement to everyone. And I dare say that if IN FLAMES were comfortable with

their musical identities at this point, this rant of theirs wouldn't have even been necessary, or thought of in the first place.

"It's contradicting to disassociate yourself from something that you see as 'normal' or mainstream and then be part of a click where everyone has to follow the same made-up rules and conventions anyway!! This is called hypocrisy."

No it isn't. It's quite valid for someone to say "I don't like the values of situation A." (which in this case is 'normal' or 'mainstream' values), and at the same time say "I respect and cherish the values of situation B." Just because someone doesn't like the mainstream doesn't mean they are complete anarchists who believe in absolutely nothing and think absolutely everything else is OK. Is IN FLAMES trying to say you have to have either mainstream values, or no values at all?

"We are self-confident enough to explore our own style and not be tied to any one's rules or fall victims of any peer pressure."

But not self confident enough to deal with the criticism of the older fanbase who isn't necessarily satisfied with the current direction.

"Some of you need to realize that you are acting exactly like the people you are trying to rebel against. Like your old folks saying to you: "Turn that noise off sonny, it's repulsive!""

So because my mother thinks it's horrible that I listen to NAPALM DEATH, that means I have no brain with which to reason with and come to a conclusion that LIMP BIZKIT (to pull a name out of the blue) or MORTICIAN (to pull a more underground name out of the blue) are crap?

"You are being just as lame when you diss others' preferences."

Did I just see a statement signed by a bunch of Swedish white men use the word 'diss'? I grew up in housing projects, and I see absolutely NO value in being 'streetwise', using street slang, or making music more 'real' in that sense, and you certainly didn't grow up using words like 'diss', so I think right here is a tremendous example of just what's wrong with IN FLAMES and why I have such a goddamn problem with where IN FLAMES is going.

"Reflect on relevancy before you make a statement because we can do without elitist minded people."

Elite: "The group or part of a group regarded as the best, most powerful." That's according to my dictionary. You get the picture. When a band says something like this, the first thing I think is "They want the 'elitist minded' people to go away because they can't satisfy any of them." There's no shame in catching with the masses, but there is much shame if it's done by crapping out your sound and giving the finger to the fans who loved you when your record sales weren't shit. Hmm, who does THAT sound like?

And another thing, notice they use complete sentences and sensible English (for the most part) here, which they never do in their lyrics. Why is that?

In IN FLAMES defense though, the metal underground is full, and I mean jam packed no legroom smushed together FULL of people who are into the image and the attitude, but don't care about the music. People who will crap on IN FLAMES just because of who they play with, and not even allow themselves to judge the music on its own merit. The perfect example is the rumored tour of MUDVAYNE, AMORPHIS, KATATONIA, CEPHALIC CARNAGE, and MORTICIAN, and what everyone on the metal boards are saying is "I'm leaving before

MUDVAYNE!" I have my doubts that such a tour is even being discussed, but if it's true, and it comes to Atlanta, I'm there to see AMORPHIS and KATATONIA, and I'm staying to watch MUDVAYNE. I've never heard a note of their music (their pictures look like outtakes from *666 International's* photo session), and I'd give them a chance. CEPHALIC CARNAGE and MORTICIAN suck, I've heard albums, I don't care how 'metal' they are. Bleh.

After all that, to show supreme irony: Back in the real world, IN FLAMES will be supporting ICED EARTH on their US tour this spring, with JAG PANZER opening. If they bother coming to Atlanta (doubtful since when I was asked about potential attendance, I couldn't honestly give great figures with confidence; I just told them 'ICED EARTH is probably more popular than NEVERMORE was when IN FLAMES and NEVERMORE toured in late 2000), I know I'm going to enjoy JAG PANZER greatly, and then be home early and let all the primadonna headliners have their fun without me.

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Quiz/whine time: Why would No Fashion Records send me things like the MORK GRYNING for review, but not things like the new WOLF and STORYTELLER, which are at least styles I'm friendly with? Unbelievable... "Finland's APOCALYPTICA have recently struck a deal with Fox Sports Net in the United States for usage of the band's rendition of Hall Of The Mountain King for upcoming NASCAR promotional television spots. The spots will be running from February 17th through July 6th of this year. This recent deal follows on the heels of some other interesting recent licenses of Hall Of The Mountain King. The track is also currently being utilized for National Basketball Association promo spots on Turner Network Television and in commercials for the California Milk Processor Board (currently being aired locally throughout the state)"... ProgPower 2002 in November is looking mighty interesting. Can't say much about it because the promoter will shoot me if I announce any names before contracts are signed, but it should be a dream lineup for near EVERYONE if everyone being chased after accepts... KING DIAMOND and MERCYFUL FATE have left Metal Blade Records over conflict over tour support. According to interviews given by the King, Metal Blade was cutting the tour support budget for the *Abigail II* tour (which was supposed to feature most of the songs from *Abigail* and *Abigail II* played in sequential order) in order to promote their younger bands on the road. King's position is that there

are a scant few real money making acts on Metal Blade, KING DIAMOND and MERCYFUL FATE being amongst them, and those are the ones you need to keep strong. I don't know what to make of the situation other than the GOOGOO DOLLS money must have run out, and the best thing for a MERCYFUL FATE album is certainly not a big tour by Diamond right before recording anyway... Tyr has signed on as bass player for VINTERSORG's live appearances... VINTERSORG is describing his upcoming album *Visions from the Spiral Generator* thusly: "The new piece will consist of a more progressive aura, expect the unexpected, but within reasonable musical coordinates of course. The voyage proceeds towards artistic abstractness but is wearing a backpack of our past." No, I don't know what he's talking about either... CARPATHIAN FOREST has signed to Season of Mist... The Italian label Code666 has come to an licensing/distribution agreement with Necropolis Records in the US... Code666's top priority right now is AGHORA, whose second album *Formless* is penciled in for an October release. Yeah, that's a good fit for Necropolis... ATROX has signed with Code666 for a four album deal, as did MANES... ABORYM has also signed with Code666... SIGH and KHANATE are touring together on the East Coast between April 30 and May 4... RAIN FELL WITHIN's *Refuge* is completed and will be released March 12... NOVEMBERS DOOM's *Welcome to the Fade's* official release date is April 5... MAUDLIN OF THE WELL go into the studio in April for their next album... KHOLD will release their second album *Phantom* in early April... Matt Zane, porn director, directed the video for DECEMBER WOLVES song *Porn Again Christian*. His comments: "Words can not define the pervarsity of this video. One is unable to conceive of the horrid images that I have created for this song. All other attempts made by artists to disturb the viewer pale in comparison. So sick you feel guilty for watching it." Sounds like crap to me... If you're interested in that ICED EARTH *Dark Genesis* box set, I'd move your ass and get one fairly quick... SOLEFALD has finished writing for their fourth album, and commented: "We are finishing writing music for our fourth album. It will be a concept album based on the common European heritage of philosophy, science, art and literature. We will start recording in the end of March, in Oslo. The music will be a continuation of that on *Pills Against The Ageless Ills*, slightly baroque and more based on acoustic instruments." Sounds fucking excellent to me... THRESHOLD will release a live album in March called *Concert in Paris*... INDWELLING has signed to Clenched Fist... "Hungarian black metallers SEAR BLISS are working on their fourth full-length album for Red Stream. Before this they will re-release their critically acclaimed *Grand Destiny* album. SEAR BLISS plays atmospheric Black Metal with somber passages including trumpet." Because when I think of somber, I think trumpets... Here's an official statement about the upcoming DIMENSION ZERO album: "The long anticipated full-length from this star-studded Swedish outfit has become a reality. Star-studded you say? What else can you call a band created by IN FLAMES guitarist Jesper Strömblad, which also features Glenn Ljungström (ex-IN FLAMES), Jocke Göthberg (ex MARDUK/CARDINAL SIN) and drummer Hans Nilsson (DIABOLIQUE, ex-LUCIFERION/CRYSTAL AGE). This super group originally got together in 1996 to record the *Penetration From TheLost World* EP, and then drifted apart. Fans have been clamoring for more since from the original guitar duo of IN FLAMES' classic sound and DIMENSION ZERO are now back and have brought us *Silent Night Fever*; nine blistering songs of raw, melodic death metal, done in the infamous Swedish fashion, produced by IN FLAMES vocalist Anders Friden!" So is this going to be the conservative, undeveloped sound that IN FLAMES themselves don't want to present? Am I being a dick for pointing out that IN FLAMES' vocalist producing the current IN FLAMES lead songwriter and the ex-IN FLAMES guitar playing for a release like this seems to be completely contradictory to the stance they take in the statement that appears on page one of this newsletter? Excuse me if I doubt their motives. We'll see

what this means for the quality of the album when the promo comes my way... Be afraid: "DREAM EVIL are a Swedish-based all-star outfit of some of the most infamous musicians around, but this group performs the other type of metal Sweden is known for-power! And who might these all-stars be? They are: Niklas Isfeldt on vocals (best known for his back-up vocals on the first two HAMMERFALL releases), the infamous producer and owner of Studio Fredman, Fredrik Nordström (producer of such great acts as HAMMERFALL, IN FLAMES, ARCH ENEMY and DIMMU BORGIR) on guitars and keyboards, Gus G. of MYSTIC PROPHECY and FIREWIND on guitars, Peter Stålfors on bass (known for composing a song on HAMMERFALL's *Glory To The Brave*) and Snowy Shaw (KING DIAMOND, MERCYFUL FATE, MEMENTO MORI, NOTRE DAME) on drums. The group's debut release, *Dragonslayer*, is eleven tracks of glorious power metal, with emotion-filled songs done by expert musicians. The band's first official show will be at the 2000 Decibel Festival on May 18th 2002 in Bengtsfors - Valhall, Sweden, and then they hope to bring their powerful music to the rest of Europe and beyond shortly thereafter." Somehow, I find myself hoping for a nuclear holocaust more than I am hoping to hear that CD. Stålfors' writing credit was for the I Believe ballad, which is probably why it wasn't mentioned as part of the press release... GRAVE's new album, produced by Tomas Skogsberg, will be called *Back From the Grave*... KALMAH's second album, *They Will Return*, will be released shortly... NONEXIST, the band featuring ex-FURBOWL and ARCH ENEMY vocalist Johan Liiva and ANDROMEDA guitarist Johan Reinholdz, will apparently be released in the States by Century Media... UNLEASHED has a new album ready called *Hell's Unleashed*... No truth to the rumors that DEAD HORSE has a reunion album called *Kicking a Dead Horse* ready, or that CARCASS has an upcoming new album called *Some Clever Title with the Name Carcass* in it... MEGADETH's remastered edition of *Killing is My Business... And Business* is Good is out... Former MEGADETH drummer Nick Menza is releasing his debut solo album *Life After Deth*, sold exclusively through www.menza.com... Lion Music has reissued MASI titles *Downtown Dreamers*, *Attack of the Neon Shark*, *Fire in the Rain*, and *Vertical Invader*... Upcoming releases on Arise Records: DARK MOOR's *The Gates of Oblivion*, VHÅLDEMAR's *Fight to the End*, MOURNING CARESS' *Imbalance*, and SERAPHIM's *The Soul that Never Dies*... "Cleveland metal band BREAKER proudly welcomes the addition of lead vocalist Jeff Shirilla to the band. Jeff replaces original BREAKER vocalist Jim Hamar, who suddenly and with little explanation quit on January 24th while the band was in the midst of recording new material. This is the third time Hamar has left the band, the last being during the recording sessions for the follow-up to *Get Tough!* in the early 90's. As fate would have it, guitarist Don Depew was recording Jeff's band ABDULLAH at his 609 Recording Studios when BREAKER received the news of Jim's unexpected departure. "I had gotten to know Jeff during the ABDULLAH recording sessions and liked both his work and him as a person", states Don Depew. "Bill Peters (Auburn Records) and myself were talking about the situation with Jim while listening to an ABDULLAH track I had just recorded the night before. At about the same time we both realized this was our guy". Jeff quickly accepted the offer and he and the rest of BREAKER immediately got back to business with recording and rehearsing for upcoming shows. "Things fell into place pretty quickly and we're now moving forward without having missed a step, some rare good fortune!", says Mark Klein. "Jeff is a smart and talented vocalist and we like what he brings to the band. We're excited about working with him and are confident that fans will find Jeff a great addition to BREAKER". Jeff currently fronts doom metal band ABDULLAH and will continue his duties with them along with BREAKER. ABDULLAH released an album on the nationally distributed Meteor City label in 2000 and will be entering the studio soon to record a follow-up, tentatively titled

Profundo Russo, due out late this summer. Jeff just turned 30 years old this past November and has been an obsessed fan of hard rock and heavy metal since grade school. His influences range from classic heavy metal like BLACK SABBATH, IRON MAIDEN and ALICE COOPER, to trashier stuff like CELTIC FROST, VOI VOD and early METALLICA. He also enjoys mellower bands like HAWKWIND, T.REX and AGENTS OF OBLIVION on occasion. "It is a great honor and thrill to even be considered for this position with such a legendary band", says Jeff. "I absolutely love the new BREAKER material and can't wait to commence work on the EP". The BREAKER EP, entitled *I Destroy*, features 6 songs of brand new studio material and will be released on Auburn Records early this spring. A full-length will follow later this year. The band will be playing 2002's Classic Metal Fest (www.metal-music-foundation.com), scheduled to take place July 11-13 in Cleveland, Ohio"... Wacken Open Air happens August 1-3, and here's a list of who's playing: AMON AMARTH, BLAZE, BLIND GUARDIAN, CANDLEMASS REUNION), CANNIBAL CORPSE, CHILDREN OF BODOM, CRIMINAL, DESTRUCTION, DIMPLE MINDS, DOMINE, DORNENREICH, DORO, EDGUY, EISREGEN, FALCONER, FLESHCRAWL, GREEN CARNATION, HEATHEN (REUNION), HOLLENTON, HYPOCRISY, IMMORTAL, IN EXTREMO, J B O, KREATOR, MACABRE, MOB RULES, NECROPHOBIC, ONKEL TOM, PRETTY MAIDS, PUNGENT STENCH, RAVEN, REBELLION, RED AIM, ROTTWEILLER, SINERGY, U D O, VICIOUS RUMORS, VOMITORY, WARLORD, WIZARD, WOLF.

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New This Week

VIRGIN BLACK *Sombre Romantic + Trance*
11- 44:44 + 3- 13:59 The End

The End finally releases the last two VIRGIN BLACK CDs together for the North and South American markets. It's been a long hard road to get here, as *Sombre Romantic* was originally released in the band's native Australia in 2000, and then by Massacre Records in Europe in 2001, but 1998's *Trance* EP is added on as a bonus (for the first pressing only I understand) for The End's release. So anyway. What the hell is a VIRGIN BLACK anyway? Glad you asked, because I don't know. There's enough non-metal in here to make me shy away from calling them a metal band. But there's definitely a metal influence, and a lot of 100% metal music to be found on *Sombre Romantic* as well. It's uniformly dark and gothic throughout, and obviously has a lot of influence from areas I know nothing about, but at the same time has plenty in common with the type of bands I like. Now that I've talked a lot and not said anything, let's run down what the deal really is. We begin the album with chanting, and then going into a choral piece with strings and such, before dropping into the first song to be recognized as such in our genre, Walk Without Limbs. Samantha Escarpe gets to shine on some doomy guitar parts here, while the vocalist gets to whisper a few scant lines. Mostly heavy, doom guitar with piano over it. Very dark. Brooding. Oppressive, but not going so far as to be in a SKEPTICISM or KHANATE sense. There's air here. But you're not safe at all, listening to it. Then comes the electronic beats, then a real emptiness of sound where the vocals are given, then a buildup of tension, then heavy parts over these almost dance beats. It's not KOVENANT-like at all, don't worry. Ominous is a good word that I can throw out there instead of dark. Of Your Beauty graces us with some extended vocal parts, something solid to grab onto other than disembodied riffs and chants and choir, but begins with just piano and clean vocals, reminding me a lot of BLACK TAPE FOR A BLUE GIRL. When it picks up from the slow piano melodies, the sound doesn't get any more dense, but the vocalist (there are three guys credited with vocals so who knows which is which, ya know?) gets a chance to stretch out, and suddenly this strikes me as being like LACRIMOSA, except this guy's got a great voice, very goth-rock I'd say, but not the dry monotone Tilo Wolff makes us endure. Some definite progressive parts with the

dancing piano melodies being matched by the drums. Then suddenly it's over and Drink the Midnight Hymn kicks in with total metal guitar riffing, 100% heavy fucking metal, black metal vocals up front which give way back to the gothic vocalist, but the guitars are up front... only to drop out momentarily so the choir can be against the electronic beats, then here comes the guitars back in. It's like a puzzle, pictures that are complete in and of themselves, but when layered, form something more complex and beautiful. I'm really stumped as to what to make of all of it. I've had an advance for six months, a proper promo copy for three weeks, and still can't say if I actually like it at all. Bewildered, yeah, curious, yeah, but all this time and still no steadfast opinion. Thus the stream-of-consciousness runthrough styled review, as it's the only way my thoughts on the subject are going to become clear. But the complete shift of sparseness, and thick metal attack, in this song happens before you notice. Gradual building and dissipation of tension, remarkable. The centerpiece of the album is the Museum of Iscariot, where we find out several things. If we haven't caught on previously, this is indeed a Christian band. Chalk up one more for the Christian bands that don't suck, and don't hammer you with moral commands like you're two years old. Anyway, acoustic guitar and another vocal showcase start off this one, and this guy's really got a cool, emotional voice. This goes on for nearly five minutes, probably the best part of the album, except for one single line delivered in death vocals ("But he is dead") that breaks the spell the guy had cast with his voice. After that, it's back to the combination of electronic beats (they DO have a credited drummer, so why does all the drumming sound oh so very fake?), non-lead vocal performance, and other strangeness. Of course I like the sections of the CD best where they work of the acoustic or electric guitars, but these electronic beat parts don't actively offend me, which is saying something. As far as the *Trance* EP, eh, I don't like that part at all. The vocals, done by the same guy as is all over *Sombre Romantic*, are just recorded/mixed in horribly, the songs are dreadfully primitive in comparison to the later work, and if you catch on a bit late and miss out of the limited double CD, don't fret, you haven't missed much. But you will have missed much by giving this entire thing a miss. It's not perfect. It's still damned perplexing. The issue with all of this is that the idea of what a 'song' is, is completely broken down and taken out in the back and shot. No rock or prog rock structures here at all. Really completely linear, using 'strange' instrumentation (or more accurately, largely lacking familiar instrumentation), and it becomes a really hard album to grasp if coming from the metal side of things. There are times I've listened to the album and thought I just listened to a 45 minute intro to an album, you know? Yet I can't deny the talent, the vision, and pure artistry that's here. <http://listen.to/virginblack>

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Already Available

ANGUS *Track of Doom/Warrior of the World*
16- 71:54 Sentinel Steel

It's re-issue review mania here at LotFP headquarters, and luckily there's not a hackjob in the bunch. Starting off the madness is, obviously, Holland's ANGUS, and both of their albums are here on one CD for your convenience. The albums originally came out in 1986 and 1987, and they've gone through the usual Sentinel Steel process of restored artwork, a complete remixing of material when necessary, new mastering, basically making the music recorded way back when sound like it was recorded using contemporary technology. So anyway, ANGUS on *Track of Doom* was a metal band that was heavily IRON MAIDEN influenced, and they start things off with the instrumental The Centaur! Not a goofy 'intro' but a three and a half minute lively metal instrumental. Cool. Heavier than MAIDEN though, with the modern sound quality giving it an excellent production by any standards. The songs are pretty good, definitely strong riffing and metal as all hell, although the vocalist isn't the best in the world. Can't go high, and he tries. *Warrior of the World* shows a more polished band, but the style didn't change all that much. Overall it's what you'd expect the underground

non-thrash 80s bands to sound like, good enough to wonder why the band isn't well-remembered but at the same time, nothing absolutely classic. But as always, Sentinel Steel has backed an excellent release and made sure the packaging has all the extras- lyrics, photos of the era, a history of the band, etc. If it says Sentinel Steel on it, it's pretty much a must for 80s metal fans or metal historians. <http://truemetal.org/angus>

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THE CROWN The Burning

11- 45:09 Century Media/Black Sun

THE CROWN definitely has a buzz about them thanks to their recent work on Metal Blade and their upcoming album with Tomas Lindberg on vocals. However, before the big label deal, they were on Black Sun and known as CROWN OF THORNS before a legal dispute caused them to clip the name. And as part of Century Media's reissue campaign, it sees the light of day seven years after its original release. Another cool job getting the liner notes and such. The music itself is a primitive form of what they're doing today, that thrash/death thing, but this is geared more towards brutality and sounding very early 90s Floridian in its approach, if you take my meaning. Death riffing all over the place, death vocals, lots of blasts. Truth be told, I used to have the early CROWN stuff, and it never caught be as being too special before. Years later, at least on this first album, it's still too underdeveloped for me to really take notice. Let's see if album number two matured better... www.thecrownonline.com

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THE CROWN *Eternal Death*

10- 52:28 Century Media/Black Sun

Yeah, this is better. More character. Tighter. Faster. More evil, if you will. And one of the more retarded covers to ever be seen in stores ('courtesy' of Necrolord, no less) sits on the front, and that is one sad Jesus. It's more formalized death metal, still lacking spark of real originality, which they found for sure on *Hell is Here* and beyond. The novelty of having a song like Kill (The Priest) at a minute and a half, and then the ten minute long Death of God shows the band wasn't a stagnant pile of shit like so much death metal out there. Decent for your more brutal needs, I think. www.thecrownonline.com

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EDENBRIDGE Arcana

12- 63:13 Sensory/Massacre

EDENBRIDGE's debut album *Sunrise in Eden* was really light in the loafers, a female-fronted 'metal' band that was just way too pretty. Sabine Edelsbacher has a fine enough voice, but it's not a powerful voice and the music behind just went along right with that vibe, and a 'metal' (what else are you going to call this? Rock doesn't sound right either...) album that's all ballad type things doesn't get very far. Third track The Palace starts off all jiggy and makes effective use of melody, making me have hope that the album won't be a catastrophe which the preceding (and opening) song, Starlight Reverie was. Soft and pretty, no dynamic tension at all, but sounding like the attempt was there. The Palace just meanders along, sounding pretty and sounding like it should be pretty. It alternates between 'Gosh, this is pretty' and 'What a limp metal album' until we hit Color My Sky (right after the hilariously titled Fly on a Rainbow Dream) which starts off with a driving riff and then sounds like a power metal song all the way, except the guitars are down in the sound to a ridiculous degree. And the guitar player is the songwriter and leader and producer (seriously, everyone else in the band might as well be trained monkey sessionists as 'all music, lyrics, and vocal melodies' are credited to this one guy), and yeah he plays all the keyboards as well, but it all sounds quite weak and I can't imagine someone wanting this on purpose. There are a few songs that don't sound like they are written as metal songs, and in those, this sound totally works, good job, A+ there. But they're in the minority, unfortunately. Ultimately, this band is flawed on its vision. The structures are metal, if they cranked up the guitars to 11 then there'd be no mistake. Yet no songs are written to contain anything other than prettiness. Pretty vocals,

pretty guitar melodies, pretty keyboard tinkling. I used to say that metal can be all things, but I never, ever counted on running into a band that really intended, and delivered us two albums of metal lullabys. This is an ugly little sister of WITHIN TEMPTATION, without the magic songs to make one overlook the painfully commercial and pop moments happening here. This is a hackjob band with an 'I am a talented artist, I can do metal easily!' mentality and it's unbearable. At least the (crappy) band photos don't look like they're in a Pantene commercial this time. Oh, and if you buy the US version, you get the European AND Japanese bonus tracks, so neener if you bought early from overseas... www.edenbridge.org

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HIMINBJORG *Haunted Shores*
7- 37:41 Red Stream

The band continues its progression and evolution away from the typical Viking metal sound, which is going to make newer fans curious as to why a French band has a Nordic name, but never mind that right now. It's a lot slower affair than they've been known for, with just about nothing that could be called fast outside the end of *The Eternal*. But anyway, this is a fairly laid back extreme metal with some really, really cool guitar work (check out the leadwork on opener *The Olves* for immediate evidence), and intelligent use of clean/spacey parts to make the harder driving passages have actual impact. The slower parts are somewhere between GREEN CARNATION and NOVEMBERS DOOM sounding, which means they're quite cool. The only weakness to the whole affair would be that the clean vocals aren't that great. For the more spoken word segments, no problem, but when there's singing, there's more work to be done. Not all that convincing. But that doesn't come into play very often, so it doesn't bring everything else down too much. Most of the vocals are of an extreme variety anyway, not falling into a convenient 'black metal' or 'death metal' vocal sound. Anyway, this is a very cool album, far and away better than their earlier material, and another feather in Red Stream's cap... (they'd just released the new BETHLEHEM late last year too, but it was all electronic and I didn't understand a damn thing so I just kept my mouth shut on it).

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I LOVE RICH *The Greatest Rock n Roll Record of All Time*

12- 35:41 Independent

Now this takes balls. An incompetent, sloppy little drum intro leads into what I hope is a joke, and not an honest attempt at a 'good time rock n roll' band. They go into songs like *Rock n Roll Party Tonight*, *Mister Heartbreaker*, *Hot Chocolate*, *World's Greatest Lover*, etc etc... I can not believe such a thing was actually recorded and professionally printed and pressed and sent out to people. This isn't funny (except a background vocalist credited as 'Samuel L. Action'), it's just bad. www.iloverich.net

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PENANCE *Alpha and Omega*
10- 53:58 Martyr Music Group

This is good doom metal/rock completely destroyed by the terrible vocals. I can't stress enough just how horrible Brian Balich is in the execution of his vocal lines on this CD. He's pathetic. Not that the lines themselves seem bad, but he can't sing, hold a note, carry a tune, or make any single line compelling here. He sounds like I would if I tried to sing. Christ. Anyway, this CD, released late last year, is the new *Alpha and Omega* material on the first five tracks, and the band's *Turn for the Worse* 2000 release for the last four tracks. You can reference *Soul Sacrifice* era *Cathedral*, or *Iron Man*, or any other of the Sabbathite bands out there for what to expect. Simple, catchy, heavy as shit songs that are very doom, even for the 'uptempo rockers.' Production on the older material is sharper, and superior to my ears, but also has the calm ballady type song where Mr. Balich's vocals are the centerpiece of the song, and oh god, just... no. I generally like this style of band, but somehow, the vocals just don't end up at an acceptable level. Shame, I really wanted to lavish praise on this because drummer Mike Smail

performed on *Forest of Equilibrium*, one of the most meaningful albums in my life. www.pencencemusic.com

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SACRILEGE *Lost in the Beauty You Slay/The Fifth Season*

19- 78:44 Century Media

Another Century Media reissue, this one takes the two SACRILEGE albums (*Lost* was released in 96, *Fifth Season* in 97) that were released on Black Sun and slams them onto one CD for your listening pleasure. The selling point they are trying to push is that current IN FLAMES drummer Daniel Svennson is on these two CDs, but the real selling point is the fact that *The Fifth Season* is one of the best albums to come out of the Gothenburg scene, *Lost in the Beauty You Slay* isn't shabby itself, and has some of the classic metal songtitles of all time. Since *The Fifth Season* is the better album, I'll talk about it first. It features a song to go into the heavy metal hall of fame, *Feed the Cold*. One of those songs that makes a band live forever, with the killer riffing, and more importantly dead-on transitioning between the different parts, and one of the most killer choruses ever with the combination of riff, crash drumming, and Svennson screaming his head off in a most inspired manner just clicks. They're even smart enough to run through the chorus without the vocals one time because the music's so good in that passage and they knew it. There's not really anything else on the album that matches the quality of this one song, but there really doesn't have to be. I don't own a single album, nor have I heard one, nor do I think one exists, where this quality of song is present from beginning to end so I'm not going to hold it against SACRILEGE in this case. Seeing as the album starts off in a grand fashion, no intro, no buildup, just METAL (and this band is as metal as ever walked the Earth), *Summon the Masses* and *Walk Through the Fire* is a no bullshit, go for the throat declaration, the noisy (but not at all bad, don't think that) production takes this Moonshield-paced song and makes it crushing and brutal, with the bass lead and guitar lead sections adding more spice, and I guess I should talk about Svennson's vocals. He's screaming. I mean, really fucking screaming. And staying in control. This guy's vocals are better than Anders Friden, Mikael Stanne, and Jon Nödtveid, and right on par with Tomas Lindberg (yet more pleasing to my ears anyway). Nothing that's easy listening but not 'I'm going to screech because it is expected; sort. The songs here are all cool, particularly *Nine Eyes of Twilight*, *Dim With Shame*, and *The Winter Enticed*. The one thing I didn't like was the serene clean guitar piece *Fifth Season*, if only because it reminded me too much in placement and style of *Slaughter of the Soul*'s mid album piece that turned down the intensity. I do have to note that Svennson's drumming impresses me more here than on *Colony* or *Clayman* (not that I've studied such individual things on *Clayman* much), probably because as a full co-writer of the songs and as a drummer makes sure he's got interesting things to do in there. Who knows. So anyway, back up one year and you have their debut *Lost in the Beauty You Slay*. 1996 was a year when the Gothenburg scene was not yet oversaturated (it became so in 97 for sure, but SACRILEGE was a band that justified the sound, not muddied it up), so the fact that the band wasn't so developed wasn't a complete disaster. Not to say the band sucked or anything, the album's pretty good, but the shortcomings are just too readily apparent when sitting right next to *The Fifth Season* on the same CD. More emphasis on a brutal sound is the first thing that's noticed, as even when the guitars are doing that melodic Gothenburg thing that Gothenburg guitars tend to do, the guitar sound's so distorted it's not quite sharp and it's quite the bowling-over kind of power. Then they go into clean guitar sections and we hear it crystal clear so I think the added power, even when not called for, was an intentional thing and not a production fuckup. The vocals are more of an AT THE GATES knockoff style much of the time (let's not speak of his more guttural style), which isn't to the band's benefit because Lindberg is better than this original vocalist for the band (who blew out his throat halfway through recording the album). The riffing is still killer but the band's ability to make cool songs out of

them hadn't matured so much, which is frightfully evident on opener *Frozen Thoughts* which is kind of awkward and the ending is like premature ejaculation- that's it? The band's creativity with song titles, *Crying Statues of Paleness and Ice*, and *Fettered in Shackles of Light* are my favorite. And since both albums were less than 40 minutes, they can both fit onto this one album with nothing being lost, and here we have some metal history. Sucks to be you who had bought them individually at the time, or maybe not since there are no bonus tracks and it's the original mixes/mastering, so no need to re-buy what you already have. The packaging here shows some real care for the band and what it was doing (a common thing for Century Media reissues, as evidence look at the *Combat* reissues with the lyrics and bios and photos, and the *Century Media Tenth Anniversary* reissues' packaging). Kristian Wahlin's covers for these two albums each get their own panel inside the booklet, and the booklet itself is divided in half for the albums, with the original band photo, credits, and lyrics appearing for each album separately and Svennson adding current comments on the releases. This is simply excellent all around.

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TIME MACHINE *Evil*

10- 43:48 Lucretia/Underground Symphony

TIME MACHINE is a 'progressive power metal' band that reminds me of KAMELOT more than anything else in overall sound (but not riffing or melody style). They're ambitious and make quality product, but for every strength they have, they have a quality that puts a bug in my ass. First, the positive. The band's got their shit together, as they should as this is their fifth (or third, or whatever, they've had so many things released and then re-released in different formats, point is the band's been releasing stuff since 1993) album. They've got the knack for melodies, knack for songwriting. The songs don't totally blend together, there are identities. They didn't put 80 minutes on here like this kind of band is wont to do so it never gets tiresome. It's a good prog/power album if you're not expecting anything in the way of complexity, or real power. Ah, the problem. The album never kicks in. The song that could best be called 'hard' is *Evil Lies*, seven songs in, and even that is a duet with a female vocalist. They spend so much energy being melodic and fancy and quite slick that I'm not feeling any energy or hunger here. I have images of totally unreasonable things like the drummer calling off practice because he's starting to perspire and it might stain his silk poofy shirt. Just things that shouldn't ever spring to mind. The vocalist is awesome at carrying a note, but his voice is so silky smooth that he sounds bored. And it's a concept album, and one dud of a concept at that. It's explained quite clearly on the front panel, as 'Evil' is reaching out through the internet (giving us lyrics that I wish were in Italian so I couldn't understand them), so God resurrects some old Inquisitor to stop him in a dimension where all times are happening at once. "Everything starts in Gerona, an Iberian resort close to the Pyrenees. At the same time, somewhere in New England among the vaults of a cathedral..." This isn't dramatic, it's not making much of a statement, this is just really bad stuff. And considering there's zero tension in these songs, I think they've utterly and completely failed in the concept of good and evil. *Act II Galileo* by this same band is a much superior and recommended album, and the passing of seven years obviously hasn't been kind.

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V/A *Britannia Infernus- A History of British Occult and Black Metal*

30- 145:41 Godreah

Now here's an ambitious project. Condense the long and storied history of occult heavy metal from Britain, and fit it on two CDs. And they do it, too. Lasting well over two hours, this monster covers it all. CD 1 covers 1970 through 1989. BLACK WIDOW opens up the festivities with flute-led hippie rock, for lack of better terms. The repeated chants of "Come, come, come to the Sabbath, Satan's there," are pretty unsettling in this context though. Pretty floofy, not something I'll look into more now. ATOMIC ROOSTER is next with *Death Walks Behind*

You. I've heard plenty about the band, but it's PARADISE LOST's version of this song that is my sole pretense as any knowledge of the ROOSTER. Crappy sound quality here, and they offer up hard rock sounds you'd expect out of 1970, I guess. BLACK SABBATH is up next with, well, Black Sabbath. No explanation needed, I hope. Then we skip the entire decade of the 70s (I guess they just weren't happening, man...) to hit 1980, and ANGEL WITCH giving us Angel of Death. New Wave of British Heavy Metal. I've actually never heard ANGEL WITCH before and this is fucking cool. Christ almighty... er, I mean Lord Satan, this is mean stuff. The first proper metal to appear here (here comes the hatemail from SABBATH people... if you're going to tell me SABBATH was the first, fine, but Black Sabbath isn't the song to tell it to me with), and half my power metal collection is headed for the garbage because it was all topped 20 years ago. Great song, I need to get my head out of my ass on these guys because I like this sound a lot better than any MAIDEN I've heard, and I suppose I should blaspheme a trinity of metal godfathers by saying I like this Angel of Death one heaping load more than SLAYER's song of the same name. Up next is VENOM, a 1982 entry called Bloodlust, and you'll all hate me again, but VENOM sucked. Fucking incompetent is what they were. Metal's strength is its emotional release through powerful artistic expression, not Neanderthal brute force. I just listened to ANGEL WITCH and Toni Iommi (who by this time was doing *Heaven and Hell*) and I'm supposed to give any respect to these stupid nitwits? Cronos, fuck you. Abaddon, fuck you. Mantas, fuck you. PAGAN ALTAR is next, and The Black Mass is slow to start, being a Satanic ritual kind of thing, and bringing us into SABBATH type riffing territory, with a doobie-dooie-do-wop sounding vocalist. I don't care if the band is 'cult', the singer's not very good. I got one of their albums that was re-issued a couple years back and I thought the same thing. Something called WIDOW is next, and the booklet declares this the most obscure song here, as the band had one self financed album and that's it. This is pretty dark stuff, in its way, but this is striking me closer to hard rock than heavy metal. No shame there, and it's certainly got better quality than VENOM or PAGAN ALTAR, but somehow not sounding like anything I'd spunk all over myself to track down more of. WITCHFYNDE is more of the same kind of stuff, only with a better sound, tighter playing, and a much better vocalist. I'm sure some oldschool people are on their way with torches and pitchforks to get me, haha. HELL is next with an awesome titled song Save Us From Those Who Would Save Us. We're still in 1983 here, the guitars are still having a hard time punching through the rest of the band (except for the solos, but these beats are pedestrian), the gang vocal choruses are cool I guess but all I can think about is tracking down some ANGEL WITCH material. SATAN's Blades of Steel comes at us from 1984, and I have the album this comes from. Full on, undeniable metal with speed again. This band features two former SKYCLAD members, don't you know. But even though the band's called SATAN, the band's not Satanic nor particularly occult, so why are they here? Something called CLOVEN HOOF is up next, and I know it's 1984 still, but the idea of a band being mean and Satanic and yet wearing spandex just kills me. Fits the NWOBHM scheme (although a bit late...) but I can see how this got buried by time. WARHAMMER is next, a 1985 band with Mitch Dickinson (UNSEEN TERROR) and Shane Embury (UT and NAPALM DEATH!) and the song here is called Halloween. It sounds more evil than UNSEEN TERROR, especially with the goblin vocals, but this is impressive for who some of the musicians became later, not because this is any great thing. 1986 arrives with ONSLAUGHT's Fight with the Beast, and we're fully involved in the thrash era for sure. A kick in the face to be sure, but frankly they are quickly forgotten as 1987 brings us SABBATH's A Cautionary Tale. Martin Walkyier and Andy Sneap are an unbeatable combination in thrash, and even I, one who could largely skip over thrash as far as personal tastes, recognizes SABBATH as a great, great band. Martin's voice has never sounded fiercer (going into full on death vocals at points), and am

I the only one who wants Sneap to remix and master these old SABBATH albums? ANTICHRIST finishes off the first CD with some fucking thrash with true black metal. At two minutes long, I guess it could be called grindcore too, eh? I said, eh? Production qualities intermixes with bizarre samples. Good grief. Disc 2 has 1990-2001. RAGNAROK start off with a 1991 song Thunderhammer that is heavily BATHORY influenced, and sounds like crap, frankly. It is taken from a demo (the band didn't get an album out til 97), but this is underground metal and what can you do if people are going to yell and scream if you want tight playing or superior sound quality. CRADLE OF FILTH make an appearance with The Forest Whispers My Name, specifically the version off of *The Principle of Evil Made Flesh*. The Vempire version has superior performance and production though, yet a good song is a good song and I guess you can say here we hear what Dani sounds like without too many effects on his voice and Nick Barker without help on his drumming. Honestly, if you're going to have CRADLE on here, there is more impressive ways to present them. The booklet description seems to hedge its bets without being blatantly biased, declaring *Dusk* and *Cruelty* as 'articulate renderings of controlled savagery' which somehow doesn't seem complimentary on a comp showcasing some dirty music all over the place. The band photo here is hilarious. I mean roll around on the floor and suck wind laughing kind of hilarious. 1994 also has the MEGIDDO demo track Eldest of Lightnings, and I suppose it is fair enough that black metal idiocy in its Norwegian form had already been publicized and been spread worldwide, so those awful shrieking vocals are understandable as far as being there, but still, gawd. BAL SAGOTH's Dreaming of Atlantean Spires is primitive, harsh, and ultimately far more metal than what they've been doing the past few albums, so it's no great insight of their current work. Still, a very epic and ambitious track for sure. DECEMBER MOON has 1996's sole appearance with Twinned with Destiny (I think that's what it says), a meandering, at times slow paced excursion into the black, with those annoying early ENSLAVED styled 'can't play keyboards' keyboards. Something called EWIGKEIT, with the band photo being one guy in a pointy wizard's hat, offers up something completely different for the decade: Clean vocals. It's heavy metal all the way, with female vocals as well, and it's a very cool song and definitely a break from the torture of all this growling lately. Wow, then it throws us for a loop with a programmed drum sequence and growly mumbling with a trippy keyboard overlay going on. OK, that was way interesting, to say the least. EWIGKEIT, huh? ADORIOR is boring blasting black metal with a woman doing the black metal vocals. If it's not a gimmick, it should be, because this isn't the most thrilling stuff. HECATE ENTHRONED comes next, and it is total CRADLE ripoff. I was not amused when this album came out in 1998 (or in 1996 when their previous stuff came out), and I'm less so now. 1999 brings PHANTASIA and lo-fi black metal. Pass. FOREFATHER is next, and it's quite similar to *Nemesis Divina* era SATYRICON to me in enough places to think that covers it. I've already interviewed THE MEADS OF ASPHODEL, but their 2001 song Christ's Descent Into Hell is goofy, intense, and off the rocker. This is an exclusive song to the compilation here (the band's contact address is the same as the people that released this CD, hmmm...) and it's full of odd and a bit humorous keyboards, it's got cool guitar leadwork, Eastern influences, the works. I reviewed these guys' CD a few issues ago and this is along those same lines. I also reviewed REIGN OF EREBUS' new CD a few issues ago and violence and velocity are all they have to offer in their sound and I'm not interested. THUS DEFILED give us an exclusive track of their black metal (and corpsepaint, sigh), not bad at all, really. OLD FOREST are a slower black metal type band, which is fine, but it's also uninteresting. ANAAL NATHRAKH closes things out with yet another full throttle blastfest. Yech. Each band gets a photo and descriptive paragraph so you know exactly who all these people were/are. If you're interested in the subject matter, or just a rather extensive history on metal in England at all, this isn't a

bad compilation at all. I may poo-poo a lot of things individually but it's still an educational experience (the first disc, anyway), and I say heavy metal fans need heavy metal education more than they need heavy metal they can smile along to and enjoy. Incredibly, actually, to think someone got BLACK SABBATH, SATAN, and CRADLE OF FILTH on a compilation together with a reason tying them together. The stars are ANGEL WITCH, SABBATH, CRADLE OF FILTH, BAL SAGOTH, and MEADS OF ASPHODEL. www.godreah.co.uk

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Video Review

You won't see very many of these in LotFP. Fact is, I generally detest music in visual form. I will never buy a music video or DVD to enjoy the music. The last video I bought was the DISMAL EUPHONY because it was discounted and I really wanted to see Anja Natasha's boobs jiggle. If I ever get a DVD player, I just might get the NIGHTWISH DVD so I can drool over Tarja. But in general, videos are someone else's visual interpretation of a song, and in metal, someone else's visual interpretation on a shit budget. Live footage is not like being there, which is good and bad, but I prefer audio bootlegs to video bootlegs (which is funny because I generally consider live albums pretty worthless). But anyway, Century Media was kind (?) enough to send along their new Visual Chaos video compilation, so I figure I should give it a whirl. What you're going to read is as-it-happens commentary on my first and only (unless there are some choice angles of Angela Gossow and Anneke van Giersbergen) viewing. I mean, my computer is 10 feet away from my TV and I have no remote... Boring intro. Then CANDIRIA's Without Water. Starting with straight up rap, what a way to start it all out. All in a dark room, then Carly screams and there's doing metalcore on a rooftop. Then live footage. Very good quality production video here, with decent split screen effects. Their entire album's problem was being too straightforward after gaining a rep for being freaky, so all this is coming across as is a weaker STUCK MOJO. Carly sure likes to show his underwear a lot. SKINLAB's Second Skin: The New Flesh is up next. They're playing in an alley while some girl drug addict or something freaks out in a dull lit room. Ah, she's a hooker. Cute except for the piercings. She freaks and flees before her john gets his. She's freaking out again. Probably because she can't pay rent now. NEVERMORE's Believe in Nothing is a cool song, let's see about the video. Finally some proper heavy metal, even if it is a slow song. Fat man and stodgy girl undressing, getting into the same clothes, and then swapping briefcases. Huh? She's knocked out and chained to a chair. There's a bomb. Chair is secured to the floor. She's free! She runs! Thigh high stockings and a smock, that's attractive. Secret agent stuff. She's trapped in a warehouse I guess. She escaped before the place blew up, yay. ARCH ENEMY's The Immortal now. Oops, it's off *Burning Bridges*, so no Gossow. Just them playing in a warehouse setting. Boring visually, and really cheap production values. Everyone's in black except Chris Amott and his bright red tunic. Closeup of guitar solos! Guitar god moves! Absolutely zero motion in this video. Ick. MOONSPELL's Nocturnia off *Darkness and Hope* is next. The album was boring as fuck, let's see the video. A couple driving in the dark find a crashed car. The band's playing in a cave, all dusty. Fernando's got on of those antique mic's I HATE that in videos. Crash victim ghosts are hanging out freaking out the living people. Couple drives off, but meets the SAME SITUATION, like In the Mouth of Madness. They're freaking out. They drive past this time, but they're caught. Interesting storyline. Ghosts watch them try to drive by. The song's boring as fuck though. Pointless. SENTENCED Killing Me Killing You is next. Dog licking old man in bed in non-porn way. Band plays on an elevated platform in a harbor. I don't remember that many totally clean vocals by Ville here. Odd. Old man walks on the beach with his dog. Snowy beach! Old man looks weary. Man walking not on beach anymore, but on snowy hilly area. Ah, he's walking to a graveyard to mourn at graveside. Those wacky Finns. He's walking home now. How pointless was that?

TIAMAT's Brighter than the Sun now. Edlund's in a matador's outfit. What the fuck? Walking on a road. There's a blonde. Talking to a skull. Ah, he's bullfighting a big big big ass construction vehicle. The blonde is driving it. What drug addict thought this shit up? He's run over in a very cheap special effects not convincing way. Again. But he's up. And run over more convincing this time. Blonde kneels over his body, nice rack. He ain't dead! Never let it be said TIAMAT videos aren't interesting at least. HASTE is up with their song Engine. Suck hardcore with traces of metal. It's a 'tour story' video. Looks like camcorder footage. In bars, in the van, on stage. Boring and pointless, like the song, and the band. Sad. SAMAEAL's next with Infra Galaxia. "Where no one went, we already stand" says the opening graphic. Now THIS makes sense! Industrial metal with a completely computer generated video in outer space. Cool stuff, especially with the opening image being the cover of *Eternal* and going from there. The images don't flow too much with the actual music going on, so that's a negative, but still, cool stuff. GOD FORBID are here to stink shit up with Go Your Own Way. Performing in a graffiti ridden rehearsal room. Wonder if that's OPETH's drumkit? Metalcore boringness. 2000 had SHADOWS FALL, 2001 had GOD FORBID, I wonder who 2002's chosen ones for Century Media will be? I hope they're more SHADOWS FALL than GOD FORBID. This vocalist sucks. Rar rar rar no inflection. Fuck off. STUCK MOJO's up next with Rising. This was filmed in Atlanta, I could have gone, but I had to work that night. There's a wrestling ring in the International Ballroom, and it's silly because War Zone Wrestling rans shows there every other Thursday, but they had to tear down their ring to allow STUCK MOJO to set up their better ring. This happened during the Diamond Dallas Page/Raven's Flock feud. It's set up like a wrestling match, entering in with the announcers. DDP puts over MOJO. MOJO are shown with WCW's old title belts. They perform in a ring with near 2000 people surrounding the ring (they were let in free, but 2000 showed up!). Raven's Flock attacks the performance, and people get thrown out of the ring and crowd surf. Raven should have been a superstar, no shit. Reis is an idiot, Van Hammer more so, Kidman does a cool shooting star into the crowd, Scotty Riggs planchas into the crowd. DDP makes the save as the flock are messing up the performance attacking everyone. Creative video during WCW's heyday that should have helped Mojo more but Nitro aired it once and that was it for the exposure. Interesting. SKINLAB with Know Your Enemies is next. Catchy beat. Grainy live action and singing in the streets stuff. Strobe lighting. No creativity. Fuck em. ROTTING CHRIST has After Dark I Feel for us now. Low quality special effects and religious imagery assail us. Suck. DARK TRANQUILLITY with Therein. Lots of time lapse footage of traffic at night, and clouds. Stanne singing to himself in a dark room. Everyone's

performing in this dark room. There's not a thing to this video at all. And there's his godawful clean vocals. Dark room, time lapse, dark room, time lapse. Ugh. For a band that is supposed to be so artistic, why is this video boring as shit? This song's taking forever. MOONSPELL is up again with Butterfly FX. Uh oh. We have a National Geographic special superimposed over singing Fernando, a woman painted up to look tattooed all tribal. She's getting frisky dancing with a man. Covoluted, pointless. GATHERING's Liberty Bell is next. Oooh, Anneke as astronaut! YUM! She has a cute face, a VERY cute face, when she's not fucking it up with the makeup. The song's total pop. If she's weightless, how come her dreads aren't floating? Nobody else from the band is in this video. That went quick because of her face. OK, this videocassette's done. Thank goodness.

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Reader Comments

Keep up the good work on your weekly LotFP! I enjoy reading them although of course, I don't always agree with your opinions. I was wondering if you ever considered doing a retro-review issue where you reviewed music from some of the older metal groups that may or may not have been the foundation of what we listen to now. Groups that may include DIO, RAINBOW, SABBATH, MAIDEN, early SCORPIONS, VENOM, POSSESSED, CELTIC FROST, BATHORY, FATES WARNING (John Arch era), DEEP PURPLE, JUDAS PRIEST, HELLOWEEN (Kiske era/Walls of Jericho), ACCEPT, AC/DC, METALLICA, MOTORHEAD, MEGADETH (early), and many more. I love most of those groups and am really into all types of metal including extreme, but excluding nu-metal shit, rap metal, hard or grind-core, and industrial. Anyway just curious. Am particularly interested in what you think about John Arch era FATES WARNING.

Eric Armstrong
Texas

As long as current material comes in at a ridiculous pace, a retro-issue seems unlikely (aside from current reissues). But since you asked (and I'll note how many studio albums of each band I own as I mention them so you can see how much I really know about them)... DIO [7] is God. RAINBOW [4] with Dio is God, without him is pretty blah. DEEP PURPLE [4] has its ups and downs but In Rock and Perfect Strangers are as strong of albums than any in my collection. SABBATH [11] with Dio is awesome (notice a pattern?), well Dehumanizer drags, and while I can hear why people love early SABBATH, to me Ozzy is the worst vocalist ever. They play War Pigs on the radio just about every time I'm riding in someone's car (all I listen to at home on the radio are political talk shows, haha) and I want to jump out the door into traffic every time. MAIDEN [10] is great up to and including Seventh Son of a Seventh Son (my favorite, actually) and are crap after that with a couple nifty songs an album.

SCORPIONS [4] I'm not nearly as familiar with as I should, but I own Lonesome Crow (odd but cool), In Trance, Virgin Killer, and Blackout, and they are all very good. China White is just a killer, killer song. VENOM [0] and POSSESSED [0] I can't stand. I recognize their influence on those who came after (and did something worthwhile) but to me those two bands are just crap. CELTIC FROST [6] is cool at their most experimental. Into the Pandemonium is great, but that early stuff you can file with VENOM and POSSESSED. Cold Lake is something I pull out when oldschool metallers come over, just to see their face when I tell them it's the best FROST. I'm kidding when I tell them that of course. Uhn! BATHORY [0], eh, the Viking stuff is pretty cool but again, others did more with the idea, and the non-Viking stuff I could piss on and not worry about it. FATES WARNING [3] with Arch were pretty good, with Awaken the Guardian being great, but that IRON MAIDEN influence was a little too much on Night on Broken. Seriously though, I'd love to hear Arch era FATES music with Ray Alder singing, as I like his voice better but the music Matheos serves up during the Alder era just isn't to my liking. JUDAS PRIEST [7] but I just unloaded a bunch in preparation on getting the remasters] is a real mixed bag. I wasn't offended by Demolition, I think a couple songs off of Jugulator are all-time PRIEST classics (Bullet Train and Cathedral Spires), and of all the rest there's good and there's bad, but Sad Wings of Destiny and Painkiller are my favorites. HELLOWEEN [8] is quite the interesting case because I like very much most of their songs, but Andi Deris is the only vocalist they've had that I've liked. Kai just flat out couldn't sing (still can't, live) and Kiske had that high pitched kind of voice I don't much like. ACCEPT [0], sorry, no, I can't deal with Udo. AC/DC [0] I can take or leave. MOTORHEAD [2] the same, although I feel guilty about that one. METALLICA's [4] best album is Ride the Lightning, with Master of Puppets being great and Kill Em All has some cool songs (Four Horsemen!). And Justice For All has two great songs (One and Dyer's Eve) but they can't write an epic, at all, and this album is tons of attempts at it. And the production stinks. The Spinal Tap album has some cool tunes, but after that, crap. MEGADETH [4] up through Rust in Peace are cool, but only Peace Sells really strikes me as great, but damn what a great album it really is. Damn you for not asking about SAVATAGE [12] so I can mention I have [12] SAVATAGE studio albums. Anything else you want to know?

LAMENTATIONS OF THE FLAME PRINCES

WEEKLY

LotFP Weekly #18 February 19, 2002

The Antelope Issue

According to Uroboric Forms, the 'Official Unofficial' CYNIC website, Relapse Records is in the process of collecting demo, live, and rehearsal material for a CYNIC compilation CD. CYNIC has themselves been unable to release live material on their own due to the terms of their Roadrunner contract (which is obviously still in force nine full years after their only album Focus came out), so obviously if this report is true, Relapse is actually spending some money to get this done. We may not have to wait long to hear what CYNIC might sound like today, as the Focus lineup performs on one track of the upcoming GORDIAN KNOT CD. That, my friends, is the definition of an event.

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LotFP Weekly is committed to bringing you interviews with the best bands, the original bands, and the just plain neat bands. How's that for a marketing tagline? "LotFP-Covering the Neat Bands!" Well poo. Anyway, one neat band would be Australia's VIRGIN BLACK, who have created probably the most diverse album in awhile that still keeps cohesion and band feeling. More emotional in their 'gothic metal' approach than a million 'keyboards, a female vocalist, and rubber pants' bands that seem to entwine themselves in European popularity right now and that are just to die for, I really think VIRGIN BLACK are an important band in the scene, because after everything, the don't offer gimmicks, they don't wield originality and weirdness as their sole weapon in gaining attention. What they offer is music in its most respectable form. Sombre Romantic has finally gotten a proper US release, so I had the opportunity to speak to lead vocalist Rowan London one early morning (past midnight where he was...)

I have to admit, I'm a little bit mystified by the whole thing. Most bands are easily pigeonholed into this scene or that scene. Describe what they are, how well they do it, then pack em up and ship em out, bring on the next band. You guys are definitely not like that. You guys require thought listening to the CD. It makes my job a living hell. What is VIRGIN BLACK? Within the context of trying to find some sanity within the music, we kind of look at it two ways where it comes from. Firstly, where we come from in Australia, in Adelaide, we don't have a very high population so really the heavy music listeners have to band together. We'll be found playing with black metal bands, also gothic bands, hardcore bands. The more important aspect is, we treat our music a little bit like writing a soundtrack. We feel like when we get the inspiration to write a song, it's a powerful hit of emotions. That actually forms the framework of a song. From there, the music, the lyrics, and everything that goes on top of that stays true to that framework and follows to emotions and the atmospheres that are along that storyline. If you skip through the tracks on our CD, it might sound a bit strange and all over the place, but I think if you actually listen to it start to finish, you'll feel it, hear it developing through heavy stages, more mellow classical and also triumphant, bombastic classic. All sorts of little touches thrown in here and there. That's kind of how we create our music and that's pretty much how we live our lives. Wearing our hearts on our sleeves and playing our music like that.

As far as the album itself, I understand that you self released it down there in Australia in 2000 and then gotten out to Massacre in Europe in 2001 and now The End Records just put it out here.

We had released it independently at first. We pretty much did everything. Financed it, produced it, recorded it. Did the artwork ourselves. Buckled down and got it all done, then threw it out there and hoped that we would get some support, which we certainly have. We're only now just starting to get around Australia now, even though it was available before.

So many bands today are really dependent on getting that record deal before really doing anything. I would assume putting together a production like this wasn't cheap, and was a big risk if you were just putting it out in Australia.

It definitely was a risk. We put out a lot for that. We had slowly built up over a period of time. It was 1995 when we released our first self titled demo. We got a small cult following, we released a mini-CD *Trance*. We had had offers from record labels at that stage, but we really feel we had something to offer beyond what we'd already released and that was *Sombre Romantic*, the album. I believe that a band can release demos and EPs and things like that and expect a certain amount of judgement on those, but when a band releases their first full length album, they should expect to be judged. We went into it knowing that this was make or break time. We just bit the bullet and put the trust in ourselves to do it. In our eyes it certainly paid off thus far. Knowing how to do a lot of the stuff ourselves. Our bass player is a professional sound engineer. That helped to no end. We all knew exactly what we wanted out of it. Everything was perfectly formed in our minds before we entered into it. Then it was a matter of piece by piece putting it together and knowing how to do the things ourselves.

As far as the writing of the songs, one of the things that makes it so difficult, and so worthwhile, is the fact that it's so diverse with all of the different songs that are going on there. How do you go about the music writing process to make it coherent front to back? At what point of the songwriting process do you start working on the lyrics?

We usually just take everything from that certain moment of inspiration. From there, every song is different. I could start with a piano piece and develop from there, it could start from a vocal line or guitar riff. It always changes. Some things that are constants... We never write together. We don't write in rehearsals. Not a single thing. Samantha [Escarbe] and I wrote everything, and we don't work together either. We always work separately, but somehow we have this mysterious kind of relationship where everything fits together perfectly. During that process, everything feeds off of each other. The drums help develop the guitars, and vice versa. Just bouncing off of each other until it gets to the end. The lyrics will come into that at any stage, really. Like I mentioned before, as long as it stays true to that initial inspiration, which is kind of like the pure song, as long as it stays true to that, we know we're on the right track.

I'm coming at this from a total metal perspective. And there are some things that mystify me. The fact that you've got a real drummer and still use electronic drums. How does that work, telling him to cool down on a song so you can use electronic effects?

That's more to do with the production, actually, than anything else. When we were recording and producing and mixing the album, we pretty much had the idea that we would take a song and find the sounds that gave it its life. Walk Without Limbs for example is industrial sounding, that's real drums in there. But it sounds harsh and it's just the way we felt it needed to be. We're not really using... there's tiny parts of electronic drums but most of the parts people think about being electronic

drums are usually just genuine drums with a different take on their sound.

What are you guys listening to out of the metal genre that would be influencing this band?

Speaking from myself, I come from a death metal background. I've only been in two bands and my first band was a death metal band I was singing in. That's where I come from. I did a lot with that band, did supports with FEAR FACTORY, KREATOR, PUNGENT STENCH, BOLT THROWER. That's where my background is, and Samantha is pretty much from that background as well. It might seem strange to some people, I'm not sure. But while that was going on we were also listening to bands like CANDLEMASS and TROUBLE. The really doomy kind of stuff. People probably listen to our album and think we fall into the classical scene or something like that. Or they'll think we're metalheads who are doing it a little bit different, and that's probably a bit closer to the truth. We come from the metal scene and we just have a passion playing all sorts. I'm actually probably going to be performing traditional operas in the next couple of years. I'm training with fairly renowned teachers. These were teachers that taught Pavarotti and Bocelli. Really upmarket opera stuff. Samantha's got some classical training, and the other guitarist Craig [Edis] has really extensive jazz training. It sounds like it contributes to our style as well. Strictly speaking, Samantha and I come from the metal scene.

The only outside-of-metal thing I can hear in your style that I know would be BLACK TAPE FOR A BLUE GIRL.

I don't own any of their stuff. I've heard the name mentioned here and there.

There's a lot of things going on in the lyrics. These aren't throwaway lyrics.

I hope not.

I guess I'll just throw out the general question, where does the inspiration for the lyrics come from, and why do you decide to write about what you do?

Pretty much Samantha and I, this is our lives. VIRGIN BLACK is the core of our being. I don't know if that's being a bit overdramatic or what not, but it's all pretty much in one place. It's a very special place for us, and I would have to say that writing the lyrics to Museum of Iscariot was an incredible experience for me. That's the time I was most removed from the physical world. That's the only way I can describe it. I got caught up in the story that was going on. It's hard to say where the inspiration comes from. Sometimes after writing you have to look back and try to interpret what you were trying to say yourself! It's not like I watch a horror movie and write lyrics from that, it's not a source like that, it comes from the core of our beings.

I definitely think Museum of Iscariot is the best thing on the album. I love how it's right in the middle so it seems the album builds up to it, where so many bands put their best stuff right up front...

Every song has had someone say it's their favorite on the album. That's one of the signs of success for us. To have someone comment on every song, saying that it's their favorite, we've had at least one comment on every song. But I must say Museum of Iscariot has had a lot of responses. It's interesting, you coming from the death metal scene. It's certainly the least heavy song on the album. Somehow, it makes sense to you, as much as the heavier material on the album.

Are you comfortable with VIRGIN BLACK being labeled a Christian band?

I would have to say yes and no. No because I am insulted by so many people that use that term to describe themselves. Yes, because in essence, it's true. There's

been so many misrepresentations of God and Christ out there, so many people I would not want to be associated with. It's a very difficult position to be in. It's the same for Islamic people I'm sure. There's extremists that absolutely shame their beliefs and most people with certain philosophies are in the situation where people are using that same name and then doing disgusting and vile things. All I can say is yes and no. There's no simple answer to it, and that's unfortunate, but that's not my doing.

There's definitely this stigma attached to Christian metal bands in the scene. Sometimes I can't figure out if in metal it's supposed to be the thing that Christianity is bad, or if it's because so many of the bands have been bad.

I have to say, where we're coming from in Australia, it's not an issue for people. 99% of people either enjoy the music or can enjoy the music and the lyrics. That 1%, I don't know. I can say to people, if you hate God you'll love us. You might be able to take that quote out of context, but what I mean is, hopefully we're giving a new representation of God that hasn't been seen too often. There's a lot of idiots out there making a lot of noise and they're the ones that are usually heard. We've got our views and philosophies on things. It might sound like I'm not making much sense, but that's because the whole thing doesn't make much sense.

I will be sure to point out, if you're going to be labeled Christian metal, it's not MORTIFICATION with the lyrics 'God rules, God rules, God rules, God rules.' Certainly not blatant and heavy handed.

That's the last generation, really. I know them, they're nice people, but there's fundamental differences there with the way we go about our business.

Religion in music, more than extreme politics, is the most controversial thing that a band can involve themselves with as part of their band. If that's not a completely mangled sentence. It's early here, I'll forgive myself.

It's late here, so...

The most incoherent interview ever! But I can listen to a band with good lyrics no matter what their philosophy is. ARCTURUS is completely Satanic, then you've got a band like BELIEVER that has Bible quotes but it's intelligent and they're not bashing you over the head with it. But at the same time, MORTIFICATION and DEICIDE might as well be the same band if you're not into either of their philosophies.

One of the things that I think is most important is not trying to coerce someone into believing the same things that I do. It's just asking them to think a little bit differently. For anyone that believes in anything spiritual, their beliefs are under threat, the popularity of their beliefs is under threat because we're really moving into a different age where people just shrug their shoulders at that. For people that do think and do come to the conclusion that there's something spiritual around, there's almost a banding together kind of thing, no matter what your specific philosophies are. We're asking people to stop and have a look at things. Take a look at how God has been presented to people. Is it a faithful representation? Not forcing you into some kind of mold and doing away with individuality. It's about thinking about things from a different angle.

Basically it sounds like you're coming from a different perspective when listening to music than making music...

It's funny that you think of it as a separate thing because I always think of it as all just part of life. The reason we make the music we do is the same reason we choose the music that we do to listen to. I come from a death metal background but that doesn't mean I don't own classical and opera CDs. I do. I'll clarify that one.

If you're in a band putting out music that's original and worth listening to, obviously music is more of a focus in your life than if you're just a person that buys a CD or two a month and goes on their merry way.

There's different times, sometimes you just need a quick fix and you put on SLAYER's *Reign in Blood* before a gig or something. Sometimes you just need that

adrenaline. I've got different CDs I listen to for that. You can draw out different things from different styles of bands. You expect certain things. An aggressive band needs to make you feel alive and pumped up, where a doom band needs to give you, well, a doomy feel. Most people's listening tastes adjust with their moods. There's always a perfect CD for every occasion, hopefully you own it, and hopefully you can find it at the time.

Where would you be in life now if you hadn't gotten into the underground music scene way back when?

I don't think it was a choice that dragged me away from anything else. There were other paths I could have gone down. I was quite a sporting fellow. I probably could have been successful there. This is the first time I've mentioned this in an interview! I won an Australian-wide gold medal for weightlifting when I was still in school. But I am certainly happy with the choice I made going down this direction. It wasn't a choice that dragged me away from sport or any other path, it was a conscious decision. That's what I saw and I actually discovered music late in life I would say. I've been serious about it since I first discovered it. I've been playing gigs now for 10 years, and I've only been into music for about 12 or so.

How old are you now?

27.

I definitely have to ask about the visual presentation of the CD. The cover is interesting, just wondering the story behind it.

We haven't put years of thought into it. When most people listen to our album, especially if they're enjoying it somewhat, they'll have pictures in their minds and they'll create images, and that's just an example of one of the images our music creates in our own minds. Somehow, in its little tiny contribution sums up the feeling of the whole album. The whole album revolves around tragedy and hope, and the title *Sombre Romantic* is an example of that. They're kind of opposites. Kind of like VIRGIN BLACK. And the album cover, what you could call the beautiful pose of someone playing the cello, but there's something not quite right. There's something rotten about it. That's what the whole band and definitely the album centers around. Looking at tragedy and hope mixing together.

As far as the band members themselves, and you've got the sun on your forehead...

It's not necessarily the sun. Just a thing. We did have a kind of idea with the individual pictures. Two different sides of our band character with the two different sets of photos. We've got the inside individual photos where we're looking quite frail and exposed. That's the composition side of the band, we just open ourselves up and let it all out. The other group shot defines our performance side. Just dramatizing the feelings we have.

What five bands have been ruling your CD player lately?

I don't have a whole lot of new music. I'm always listening to CANDLEMASS' *Nightfall*. Certainly not new music.

They just re-released it, so that counts.

Perhaps CEMETARY's *Godless Beauty*.

Yeah, I've got all five of their albums.

They used to be a death metal band, but they changed along the way. Obviously you still related to what they were doing. Probably has something to do with the age bracket as well. We all understand it somehow. Probably Brahms' Symphony No. 1. And AGALLOCH, *Pale Folklore*.

Sucking up to the labelmate there.

No, definitely not! They deserve a lot of credit. Excellent album. And DEATH'S BOUNDARIES, a band from Adelaide. Brilliant technical thrash band which I'm sure you'll hear about in a bigger sense one day.

You've self released your album, then had a European label handling your album, and now an American label handling your album. How is it been trying to market your own material versus how Massacre dealt with it versus how The End's dealt with it so far.

We've gone everything, pretty much. We've done a lot of hard work ourselves. We've had the experience of having what we consider a fairly big label, Massacre, putting out

our album. Having certainly a lot more muscle than we've got on our own. And we've got a comfortable medium for North and South America for The End. It's a brilliant balance of true integrity, and being an up and coming label. I'm sure there's going to be in a couple years time, we won't believe how The End started!

I guess what I was hoping to find out, I've talked to some bands that have had a really good experience dealing with Massacre, and some that have some really crap experiences dealing with Massacre.

Well you should just say that.

I was hoping you'd volunteer it yourself so I don't come off like an instigating asshole.

Ah. OK. I can't relay any stories like that. Our experience has been very good. It's a strange thing after looking after yourself for so long, we've been doing it all ourselves for many years now. And then having a fair amount of muscle power in Massacre, I don't know, they don't really do a lot in the US, but they're quite big in Europe. They've got KING DIAMOND on their label, they have to be fairly big to have that guy on. I can't really fuel the fire. That's probably good to hear a good story about them!

Since this material has been out there for a bit, what's the timetable for new material?

We aren't in a position yet where we're able to tour, so that means we've had time to slowly start putting some things together. We haven't been on the road doing anything so it's coming along quite nicely. We're certainly not going to rush it. It'll be ready when it's ready. I'm fascinated to see what it comes out like myself!

The second album, 2006, VIRGIN BLACK!

Yeah, we'll see! I think we should be able to put it together in the not to distant future.

Any final words for the reading audience?

I think there's plenty of words in there already! That's my final word.

Discography

Virgin Black (1995 Independent)

Trance (1998 Independent*)

Sombre Romantic (2000 Independent**)

* re-released with *Sombre Romantic* 2002 The End

** released 2001 Massacre, 2002 The End

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*** **

Janne Wirman (billed as Janne Warman) is someone who has a gig in a band you just might know: He's the keyboard player for CHILDREN OF BODOM. Hard to argue with that talent behind the keys, but what's not been so well known on this continent is that the man has his own solo project called, funny enough, WARMEN. The second album Beyond Abilities has been licensed by Century Media for a proper US release, so there'd never be as good an opportunity to speak to the founder of the band as this...

WARMEN just got this past week a US release. When you came up with this project, did you ever think of the possibility that this was going to get released in the US?

I think I knew when we were doing this that it was going to be released in the US.

I haven't had the opportunity to hear the first album. How did the project come about in the first place, and how was the first album compared to this one?

Somebody just suggested to me as a joke "Maybe you should do a solo album." OK! Then I found these great musicians, the same dudes who are involved in this second album too. It was more instrumental stuff, so it wasn't that interesting for a lot of people. But now we did this second album, and I wanted to have more singing to make it more interesting and I think we kind of made it really nice. All the feedback I have heard about this second album has been really good.

I've got all the CHILDREN OF BODOM stuff, I love how the guitar playing and the keyboards go against each other, but for some reason it surprised me that *Beyond Abilities* sounds more, I hate to put it this way because people are going to react negatively to the word, commercial than the CHILDREN OF BODOM sound, even getting past not having growling vocals. How do you approach what you're doing with the keys there versus what you're doing on your own stuff?

Alexi [Laiho] writes all of the music for COB, and he also writes my parts. Not my leads and my solos. Then again, when I'm doing my own stuff, it's a totally different approach. I'm doing my own music and all of the stuff for all the instruments. What WARMEN sounds like is more influenced by what I've been listening to lately and stuff like that.

"No Roland or Korg products were used in the making of this album." What's the significance of that?

I had this really shitty sponsorship deal with Roland. I was giving them a lot of publicity and I never got anything from them. The same thing happened with Korg. They offered me a sponsorship deal, I was already giving them some promotion, and then they also didn't actually do anything. So it was a big fuck you to Roland and Korg. What I notice about Finland, different than any other country in the world, is that the metal stuff, real metal stuff, actually gets on the charts. That amazes me. What's keeping Finland the way it is where people value musicianship there?

I don't know. I've been doing a lot of these interviews and they always ask me this! I really don't know, man. Maybe it has something to do with the winter? It's so fucking dark and cold. It's shitty and I hate it! Some other people hate it too and like to listen to aggressive music! I don't really know.

How did you select the vocalists you did use?

On the first album we had two songs with vocals and Kimberly [Goss] sang on both of them. We already had a deal where she's going to sing on our future productions too. Timo Kotipelto is going to release his solo album soon and we had this nice exchange. I play the keyboards on his album, and he sang a few songs on my album. It was an easy choice, and I of course like his vocals in STRATOVARIUS. The third guy, Pasi Nykanen, that was really funny. We had this song, and didn't have a singer for it. One weekend I was drinking in a bar in Helsinki, and this guy started to sing really drunk, right in the middle of the bar. I just told him that he's going to sing on our album. He was like "OK." That's the story behind the singers.

Is he in another band?

When he was singing the parts on my song, he needed a lot of alcohol to do it. I kind of made it possible for him. After recording the parts, we went to a bar with another band, THRONE OF CHAOS. He started to sing because he was so drunk in the bar, and the guys came up to me and asked "Does that guy really know how to sing?" I was like "Yeah, sure!" So he joined THRONE OF CHAOS.

With the title *Beyond Abilities*, with the sample at the beginning, it comes off a little arrogant I think. Just flat out saying "This guy's going to do a lot here."

I kind of feel it's totally the opposite. *Beyond Abilities*, in the very beginning of the album, I think the guy in the sample is speaking about me or something. I feel it's irony or something, just a good joke. I don't think I give the impression that I'm fucking good or something.

When one thinks keyboard player solo album, I think about these real wank sessions, but you've got real songs on this thing. Usually instrumentals go over my head pretty much but with yours I'm doing air keyboards to them.

Thanks a lot, man! That's nice to hear. I think the first album was too much of this wanking shit.

How do you know when you're composing things that you don't cross that line between being bored yourself, and boring other people?

That's a problem because I don't know. I just try to do my best. I was concentrating a lot on the arrangements of this

album because as I told you I wanted it to be more interesting. Hopefully I managed to do that.

A few of the song in particular I'd like to talk about. The first one was Alone. Why that song from that band?

Kimberly actually suggested to me to do a cover song. I said OK, if you have some good ideas. She had that song in mind. I was like "Yeah, let's do it!" It gave me the opportunity to play real piano and that's something I really like to do. Of course I love the song, it's this 80s stuff, I really like all this 80s hard rock shit. I like the song, I like the way Kimberly sings on it, and I got the chance to play real piano.

Didn't that get released as a single? Why not one of your songs as the single?

Maybe we were trying to get it played on radio and stuff. But it didn't. It was played a couple of times but it wasn't the success we thought it might be.

As far as you saying you like play real piano, as the songwriter and the guy playing the keyboards, aren't you in control of what you play and when you play it anyway?

<laughs> Yeah! I think it might be too boring for people to listen to me play just some stupid shit on piano. I like to play a little bit of piano on my own albums because these days it's so fucking easy on the computer to do all the synthesizer stuff. Just anybody can do nice keyboard work and solos and shit, like a few Italian bands where the producer did it all with a computer and nobody actually played anything. I like to play a little bit of real piano so people know I really can play something. I've heard the rumors from so many sources about this one Italian band where the producer played all of the keyboards and the drums with the computer. The guys never even did anything. But I'm playing a lot of shit live with COB so I think the people know I really can play something.

How do you name your songs that don't have lyrics?

I'm a fucking jerk. I don't care about song names or anything. The songs don't have any names! When the first album was about to be released, I didn't have any names for the songs. Somebody from Spinefarm just did the names. The only thing I came up with here was the *Beyond Abilities*. Somebody else made all of the other song names. I really don't care. I just like to play a little rock and roll, I don't know anything about song names!

How much freedom given for their lyrics?

They each wrote their own lyrics. When I listen to music, I don't care about lyrics. I never listen to the message behind the lyrics shit! I just listen to the playing, the producing, the sounds, the arrangements. I don't give a fuck what they are singing. All the singers did their own lyrics.

Even in CHILDREN OF BODOM, isn't it true that some of the songs have vocals but no lyrics?

Yeah, it was true on the first album but after that there's been words with the vocals. I don't know how you can hear it, but anyway... On the first album, Alexi improvised a lot. We call it 'speaking Norwegian' what he does. On the second and third albums he wrote lyrics. Definitely on the third album he had lyrics for all the songs.

Salieri Strikes Back. Have you ever heard GOBLIN from Italy?

No.

RHAPSODY's latest?

Of course.

On Queen of the Dark Horizons, they use part of a GOBLIN song that has these keyboard runs that sounds pretty much like the ones in Salieri Strikes Back. I'm guessing you're talking about the classical composer [Antonio] Salieri? I've never seen that credited back to GOBLIN.

I really don't know a lot of Salieri's work. Have you seen the movie Amadeus?

No.

Oh, fuck man. You should check it out right now! Today! When you are going home from your daytime job, and walking by a Blockbuster, you really need to see it! All the jokes and all our humor from COB and WARMEN is from that movie. When you see that movie, you'll realize

the entire Finnish heavy metal scene. Really, man! In this movie, Salieri kills Mozart, and all the Salieri jokes come from this movie. It's a must!

In the American music market, how far do you think WARMEN has the chance to go?

I don't think it has a chance to go far, but I'm glad it's been released there and guys like you are doing promotion for us with the interviews. The music is so strange, because it has instrumental shit and weird vocals, so it's not going to sell big amounts, but I hope the second album sells a little bit more than the first one. I have no big expectations about anything, for me it's just fun to do an album and release it.

Since you show you show you can write songs here, why is there just the one writer for CHILDREN OF BODOM and not input from everyone else?

From the first album of COB, Alexi has been writing everything. What he does, he does really well. I love his songs and shit. But actually I was supposed to do something on the last album, but I kind of fucked that up myself. Maybe I'm going to do something for the new album I'm working on right now. Alexi has such a clear vision of that band and what it's going to sound like, so maybe it's better that we don't interfere with his shit too much.

The first album is the one I like the best because it just seems so out of control. It got streamlined later on. I love the energy.

It's very punk rock, the sound is shitty but you can tell the guys are really trying.

I know your tour schedule with CHILDREN OF BODOM must be nuts, but what about for WARMEN?

We played a few shows live in Finland for the first album, and we really would like to play live gigs now for the second album, but I'm pretty fucking busy with COB. Maybe some summer festivals. I really hope we can play live.

Honestly, what's more personally satisfying for you? Being part of a well known band like CHILDREN OF BODOM, or getting your material out as WARMEN?

Oh, shit, that's a difficult one. When we are touring with COB, we are touring all over the world. With the next album, we are coming to the US for a full tour. That's something we haven't done so far and it kind of pisses us off. With COB, because it's so well known, we get to tour a lot and it's fun. We're young guys and like to have fun and drink all over the world. But with WARMEN, there's this point that I get to have my own shit released, and that's also fun. I don't know which one is more satisfying because they both have their own things that I really like. So, fuck. I'd have to go with COB right here, because playing live with that band is awesome. We've been touring so much lately that we don't have any pressure. We know all the songs. We know what's going to happen. We have no stress about the playing. Some of the songs are pretty technical, and when you go on tour with them for the first time you always have to be nervous if you're going to do it right. Nowadays it's so much fun. We're confident with what we're doing. We don't have to concentrate so much with what we're doing so it's a lot of fun.

I've always wondered about keyboard players. You can plug in just about any sound ever made into your instrument and play it. How do you come to use the sounds you do?

The main thing for me, the lead sound that I play on the solos is actually made by Jens Johansson. That's something that I really am going to use always. It's such a fucking killer sound and I'm glad he gave it to me! On this new WARMEN album I did a lot of testing and changing, like on Dawn, there's some modern synthesizer shit going on that you don't hear on COB. I was adding some techno synth shit every now and then. But to me, I can hear the playing behind sounds so it's not so important. I like to use good basic sounds and not to vary too much.

I've noticed on the sleeves of the CHILDREN OF BODOM albums, your name is presented differently on each album. Are you going to change it again?

I think so. It's fun to confuse the fans. That's a lot of fun. On the first album it was my real name, I can't remember what was on the second, and on the third was Janne Warman. I think we're going to come up for the next one. I'm trying to confuse people as much as I can.

OK, well that's all I really have. If you could name five keyboard players you think people should check out?

Oh shit. I'm not going to find five. Jens Johansson, for me, he's the fucking man. He's the best in the business. Then I have to tell you that I'm that much of an asshole, I don't like anybody else. I kind of put myself right behind him. He's number one, his work, especially his solo work, should be checked out. Then I have to name some classic dudes, a bit older. [Rick] Wakeman, [Keith] Emerson, Jon Lord. These newer guys all have something I really don't like. Shitty sounds, or playing stupid scales or something.

Any final words you have?

I hope the US audience is going to find the album bet-, ah shit, the first one wasn't released over there. I hope the US audience is able to listen to the album, though it's very different from COB, and can appreciate the work I did with it. That's it!

Discography

With WARMEN:

The Unknown Soldier (2000 Spinefarm)

Beyond Abilities (2001 Spinefarm/2002 Century Media)

With CHILDREN OF BODOM:

Something Wild (1997 Nuclear Blast/Spinefarm)

Hatebreeder (1999 Nuclear Blast/Spinefarm)

Tokyo Warhearts (1999 Spinefarm)

Follow the Reaper (2000 Nuclear Blast/Spinefarm)

Contact

janne.wirman@warmen.net

www.warmen.net

www.cobhc.com

www.centurymedia.com

www.nuclearblast.de

www.spinefarm.fi

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Apologies for this week's issue mailing out late. Next week's issue will be likely similarly delayed. There are major hardware issues at LotFP headquarters that will be dealt with between this and next issue. I expect it to be a couple days transferring all the needed files between the old machine and new machine (my tech knowledge stopped around 1994-95). On the plus side, the mailings will become a lot more professional as I'll start using real mailing labels, the downside is that annual bonus at work is going to be spent on hardware rather than the giant \$1100 mystery shopper consumer report article I was going to do on 20 different online CD vendors. However, constant application shutdown on a machine with a 16 color display and no sound is getting kind of ridiculous and typing some of this stuff twice just can't happen anymore. I'll be taking a couple days off from my paying job so we'll be completely on schedule and running better than ever by the March 5 issue.

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If every regular visitor donated that \$1 just twice a year, this website can be kept online indefinitely with its archives free to all.

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News

A Paul Baloff memorial site has been set up at www.paulbaloff.com... Great news, as Steve DiGiorgio will perform bass duties on the upcoming VINTERSORG album *Visions from the Spiral Generator*. Vintersorg himself will be coming to the US for March 8-9 recording sessions. At this point, I know I'm going out of my mind waiting for this album, yet anything less than a masterpiece is going to be a disappointment. Living up to *Cosmic Genesis* is hard enough, but add in the additional musicians, and Vintersorg's own proclamations about what the material is, you have a lot of hype that needs to be lived up to... Some followup on the *Britannia Infernus* compilation last issue. MEGIDDO (not the same band that's on Barbarian Wrath currently) had members of ANATHEMA tooling around, and ANTICHRIST was just GISM (with featuring Earache founder Digby Pearson) sped up, and vocals added in order to appear on a thrash metal compilation... Poll question of the day: If you met someone that said the only 'real' metal band they really know is ANCIENT RITES, wouldn't you figure that to be a bit odd?... THE CROWN will be touring with DARKEST HOUR in the States between April 5 and May 2... Check out this monumental press release: "There is no denying MANOWAR's impact on rock music. During its storied career, the band has redefined heavy metal by combining peerless musicianship and song writing. Its member's unbreakable character, tenacity and mettle has enabled the band to battle immeasurable odds, overcome huge obstacles and build an awe-inspiring legacy that continues to grow with each passing year. The band, however, has not rested on its laurels. MANOWAR has returned with *Warriors Of The World*. Staying true to its nature, MANOWAR refused to compromise and use conventional methods to capture its trademark music. During the last two years, the band's members worked around-the-clock constructing its latest studio (located in bassist Joey DeMaio's house) appropriately named Hell. Once the fully digitized, state-of-the-art studio was word locked to a digital word clock (an industry term referring to the synchronization of digital equipment), the band's creative juices flowed, resulting in an album that is destined to become another jewel in the crown of the Kings of Metal. *Warriors Of The World* is a fierce, unrelenting rollercoaster ride of sounds and metallic flavors; a breathtaking listening experience that is certain to appeal to both the band's cross section of fans and aficionados of grand, epic music. MANOWAR has once again fanned the flames of the fiery beast known the world over as heavy metal. *Warriors Of The World* was produced and engineered by the band's most demanding critic, themselves, who recorded each instrument, including full orchestrations, ensuring that each detail was up to the MANOWAR standard of excellence. "We had to put ourselves under the most rigid conditions to scrutinize the performances and make sure we were creating the music that our fans have come to expect from MANOWAR," explains bassist Joey DeMaio. Like a celebrated painter presenting his latest work to a master frame maker to encapsulate, MANOWAR hand-carried the master hard drives containing the album's completed songs and placed them in the capable hands of engineer Ronald Prent to mix and add a final polish. During his 20-year career, Prent has built a prestigious resume working with artists such as The SCORPIONS, The POLICE, DAVID BOWIE and most recently, RAMMSTEIN. Here are a select song titles, and a brief explanation of the songs: "Warriors of the World United" (A classic MANOWAR-styled anthem with an epic metal chorus, sure to be sung by everyone across the world.) "Swords in the Wind" (Grand, epic and dramatic are only a few of the words that describe this tale of warrior bravery.) "Nessun Dorma" (Pure art and pure opera combined with the

melodic power and might that could only be done by MANOWAR and MANOWAR alone.) "Hand of Doom" ("Vengeance is mine," said the Lord. It may belong to the Lord, but he has chosen MANOWAR to bring it to the world in a tale of fierce mystical revenge.) "Call to Arms" (Inevitably will become *Warriors Of The World* what "Hail and Kill" is to *Kings Of Metal*. This epic is a call to all fans the world over to hail the glory of being a MANOWAR fan and join in the celebration of metal and might.)" I usually don't print tracklists and such shit, but that was high comedy. Let me rewrite that entire press release in a more compact form: "MANOWAR to release same old shit..." GOD DETHRONED had these hopes for an upcoming show: "One of the highlights this year will be a show in the world famous Milkyway club in Amsterdam. We will perform together with a VJ. This guy also did our videos. The show will contain all kinds of footage of these videos, but also lots of new stuff. All the images shown say something about the songs we're playing. Further we will have TV screens built up like Satan's Crosses. And also a freak show during the show. Hopefully we can shoot all this and release it as an official home video..." CHINCHILLA has *The Last Millennium* due out next month. They should tour with CUSTARD on the Dumbassly Named Band Parade... The End Records and Prophecy Productions are pleased to announce that they have entered into an exciting new collaboration. After the very successful results of the mutual new GREEN CARNATION release, and the fact that both labels commonly work on the more eclectic, artistic metal styles, they have decided to take it a step further and exclusively distribute and promote each other's releases in their respective territories. Thus, The End Records will be handling releases from both labels in North and South America and Prophecy will do the same in Europe. Upcoming releases by Prophecy include: EWIGHEIM, AUTUMNBLAZE, EMPYRIUM, TENHI, DORNENREICH reissues of the first two albums with bonus tracks... The End is also promoting the new THEORY IN PRACTICE, PALE FOREST, SQUEALER, CADAVERIA, and KHOLD albums for North and South America. The first three of those have already arrived here right at press time but warrant some actual listening time before comments are made... THE GATHERING on their new album: "The new album will contain the best tracks we ever wrote. It will be a piece of music, no fragments, but a true musical story, from the beginning to the end...[it] is quite gloomy and dark, a sort of post-nightmare feeling. Sometimes sweaty and uncomfortable, sometimes haunting you. It's difficult to label the music, so I will not..." Candlelight USA will release the new INSOMNIUM, INIQUITY, and SOLAR DAWN on April 30, with KAAMOS and a re-release of TIDFALL's first coming in May... About the upcoming AGALLOCH: "AGALLOCH is still in the studio and it seems that they will need a few more weeks until recording is completed. Early indication seems to foreshadow that *The Mantle* will be a phenomenal album. The music appears to draw from a lot more diverse references, most notably PINK FLOYD and GODSPEED YOU BLACK EMPEROR coming to mind!"... How's this for a lame press release from Nuclear Blast: "Yes, all the rumors you have heard about prison time for GORGOROTH vocalist Gaahl are all true. It seems that the Norwegian courts have decided it wasn't very appropriate for him to be assaulting people, so they will be locking Gaahl away for a while so that he can ponder his actions. The courts have not yet decided on a sentence yet, but you can be sure that whenever he gets out GORGOROTH will release one very angry CD." I know it wouldn't much go along with the macho bullshit attitude of extreme metal, but someone getting locked up for a violent crime isn't really a joke... A winning Peter Tagtgren quote from Nuclear Blast: "Peter claims that [Catch 22] is the first 'real' HYPOCRISY release, so it's about time that you checked 'em out if you have not already." It's in my pile here on my desk, and I just can not wait to hear something that suddenly makes all the other albums suddenly not count. I hate when bands say that shit... Heard of TAPPING THE VEIN? "The band's debut disc will be released in April 16th on Nuclear Blast

through a new imprint Rebellion Entertainment." Rebellion? Who came up with that name?... KING DIAMOND's *Abigail II* hit Billboard's Independent chart (kind of like the welfare chart for labels that don't have Michael Bolton profits to market albums with) at #12... CANNIBAL CORPSE will be touring with DARK FUNERAL, INCANTATION, and PISSING RAZORS this Spring in the US... "ENGINE have nearly completed their Metal Blade Records sophomore release. Featuring Ray Alder (FATES WARNING), Joey Vera (ARMORED SAINT), Bernie Versailles (AGENT STEEL) and Pete Parada (FACE TO FACE), ENGINE's follow up to 2000's self titled debut promises to be one 2002's most anticipated releases. The release, currently untitled, is once again being produced by Vera..." In addition to the ambitious *Leonardo* project and the fourth MAGELLAN album, Trent Gardner has written material for a new EXPLORERS CLUB project. Special guests include drummer Terry Bozzio, DREAM THEATER bassist John Myung, Kerry Livgren (KANSAS), Gary Wehrkamp (SHADOW GALLERY), Mark Robertson (CAIRO), Marty Friedman (MEGADETH), Steve Walsh (KANSAS) and James LaBrie (DREAM THEATER) Terry Brown mixed the album. Dave McKean has designed an incredible package for this 2nd EXPLORERS CLUB release" It will be called *Raising the Mammoth* and will be out late April...Bloodstock 2002 in England may be one to use those frequent flyer miles for. Only four bands have been confirmed, but those bands are RETURN TO THE SABBAT (Martin Walkyier), BALANCE OF POWER (give a fuck), BAL SAGOTH, and.. BLIND GUARDIAN. Apparently the bards haven't ever had an album officially released in the UK and *A Night at the Opera* will be their first. About time... www.opeth.goddamnbastard.org has free downloads of all your OPETH live bootleg needs. 13 live performances going back to 1991 are in audio form there, as well as four videos for download. An excellent site... Sanctuary is re-releasing the GAMMA RAY studio catalog, from *Heading For Tomorrow* through *Powerplant*. Each album will be remastered, have new cover art, and three bonus tracks. What gets interesting is that individually, they will be available from March 4, but they are also being released as a box set on March 18. Apparently the new artwork will all combine to form one larger picture as well. Not bad...

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New This Week
DECAPITATED *Nihilist*
12- 60:30 Earache

There's no mistaking this as anything but a brutal death metal album. The cover art, any 2-second sample you could take from the album, every single vocal line screams death metal. As will be my frequent complaint with these kinds of albums, the one thing missing here would be songs as I think of them, yet that's not what the band is trying to achieve so there you go. My description of one song might as well be the description of another. Brutal riffs, powerful triggered drumming, they know their instruments, has influences from MORBID ANGEL, SUFFOCATION, CANNIBAL CORPSE littered in, comparable to VADER, etc. Little riff bits just stewed together, almost a mix and match pastiche and I can't imagine many of these songs being different if you actually did mix and match bits. Yet there's no 'art' quality here beyond the technical ability, it's just brutal. To their credit, it's not all hyperblast. In fact, the blast beats are intelligently done, with a lot of the tracks being midpaced and just very busy within that frame. Vocals are all the low death metal roaring, they keep it pure, no hardcore or black metal creeping in. Somewhere in my soul, there's something that tells me that a bunch of kids (OK, their average age is 20 now, not kids) playing no bullshit, technically proficient death metal and bringing it to the world in this day and age is a good thing. Somewhere in my head is telling me MORBID ANGEL, DEATH, CARCASS, and the rest all released their brutal albums full of individual songs and somewhere, the idea of brutality lost the idea of songcraft and instead decided to micro-manage their portions before serving. A peanut butter sandwich, chicken leg, and grapes are awesome

guys, but if you got it all on a plate at the same time, you'd be all "What the hell?!" and that's kind of where I am here. I recognize where a band like this is necessary as part of a balanced scene, I recognize that saying "there's no proper song here" is hypocritical when the next 15 minute long winding OPETH piece is likely to get praise, but it all comes down to the fact that there's plenty of brutal bands I listen to and enjoy (NASUM, CRYPTOPSY, early ENTOMBED, etc), that I celebrate, that I don't ask "what's missing here?" I'm asking that of DECAPITATED in the same way I always asked it of SUFFOCATION. Brutality is a tool, not a goal unto itself. Any antelope knows that. www.decapitated.metal.pl

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DECEMBER *The Lament Configuration*
10- 36:14 Earache

Well, here's proof that not everything Devin Townsend touches will be gold, as he produced this second album of, well, noisy metal. Not that the actual production quality is bad, as it's thick heavy as fuck, and sonically clear, probably the best the band could have ever hoped for. But that doesn't make the band or its material interesting. Some convoluted, sludgy mass of death, thrash, hardcore... just this jumble of heaviness. Zero melody to be sure, and I've listened to this thing a half dozen times trying to grip it, and the songs are just boring as shit. And this vocalist isn't too great, just continuous, over the top screaming and more hardcore growling, reminiscent of EYEHATEGOD vocals or something. It's really not skilled, emotive yes, but completely inarticulate and one of those that sets a bad example for anyone who sees extreme vocals as an art and not something just anyone can do. Not that he doesn't have a cast iron throat to get this done, but... bleh. This is a giant shit sandwich that I just can't tolerate.

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DEW SCENTED *Inwards*
10- 37:57 Nuclear Blast

You say thrash, I say death, whichever, DEW SCENTED are finally getting a chance on the larger stage as their previous three albums have pretty much been ignored in North America... (although I did an interview with them in LotFP mag #2). But *Inwards* should be well received by all that have gotten great pleasure from THE HAUNTED and the like, as they play this superthrash/death metal that just kills most of its competition dead. Unrelenting riffing (yeah, the riffs) has a definite malicious intent for sure, without ever resorting to a blast beat (the open of Degeneration comes oh so close) to drive home to point. Powerful stuff. While pure aggression certainly isn't my thing, when done well I'll certainly recognize it and this is the good stuff. However, I have an issue with the band that keeps it from killing me, that being that the vocals seem a bit 'safe.' Very angry, but without that real sense of throatkilling rage. Hard to explain, as he's plenty pissed off, but the rest of the band has so much more energy that this guy almost doesn't have a chance- he's bulldozed. I'd definitely call the band a death metal band as nothing reminds me of old EXODUS, FORBIDDEN, or METALLICA in the way their material is written, but thrashheads have claimed this band as their own, so whatever. It's powerful stuff, not clichéd or moronic, good for all your heavy metal attacking needs. <http://come.to/dew-scented>

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EPHEL DUATH *Rephormula*
13- 73:22 Earache

So I'm discussing with someone who very much resembles the title of this rag (not the lamenting part) exactly what it is I do here, and it strikes me that I'm not doing what it is I think I'm doing. I'm in the business of projecting, peddling, and manipulating emotions. Don't believe me? What is music about? Well, it depends on who you are. To the labels, music is a means to make money. To be market the correct sound with the correct image to the correct audience. When it works, money is made. Any "integrity" is in the form of selecting the sounds, the image, and the selected audience. What is music to the musician? I figure it is one of four things: Money, work, fun, or art. In our scene, making music for money is laughable, and that being the goal is vilified.

Rightly so? I'd lean towards yes in this regard. "What can I do to sell the most records and put cash in my pocket." You know the type. They are pretty easy to ferret out so it's not concern of mine. The second type, for work, is far more respectable, if not the spectacular. Doesn't want to be rich or live the good life from all this as an expressed goal, but uses his skills to complete someone else's vision. All session players, producers, and Jens Johanssen probably fit in this category. CANNIBAL CORPSE, DEICIDE, RUNNING WILD, and the like at this point? Usually boring and appealing to a lesser and lesser fanbase as time goes on. For fun? These are the bastards. The dangerous ones. The "Me too!" people. The reasons why there's a Sunlight sound, a Gothenburg sound, why Norwegian black metal is identifiable as a sound, you get the idea. People with no voice of their own, but taking the time to practice for hours and hours on their instruments just to come out into the world as parts of cover bands playing songs of their own making. Pathetic. But those making art, you can tell. It doesn't sound like much else on the market. It often doesn't sound 'right' when placing it into an established category. This is music that has a need to be released, I think, rather than a conscious decision being made by the musician to create a certain type of music. That's the kind of band I look for, the band going above and beyond the call of duty, creating something greater than what one would expect. A band/musician creating from the heart, or at least being a good enough trickster that I think they are, or a good enough craftsman where even if they aren't, 'objective quality' is good enough to place it at the top of the heap. But that's what I look for. What are other fans looking for out of the music they listen to? I'll let you in on a little secret. I don't care. The fans seem to be divided up into four parts: The clueless, the passers-by, scenesters, the music listeners. The clueless are those just discovering a couple of bands or three, digging around, their opinions are pure but their sense of context is shit, and they'll turn into one of the other three types of fan. The passers-by are those which get into the underground scene, usually pretty young, but don't stick around long. A few years, maybe, a passing phase, where they'll delve in as hard as they can and pretend to be either a scenester or music listener, but in the end, they 'grow out' of it as the effort of tracking down and keeping up with their preferred styles and bands interfere with real life just isn't worth it. Scenesters, like the 'playing for fun' bands, are pretty dangerous I think because it gives these 'fun' bands their market. Scenesters seem to have a definition of what is 'good', and if a band matches that definition, then they're great, and the farther away from that definition, then they're no good. The classic example I know of are the brutal grind freaks, but you'll also see it in power metal fans, prog metal people, in any established 'scene' with its own sound. That someone can have 500 albums based on blast beats, or 500 albums that sound like HELLOWEEN warmed over, on purpose and being pleased by that, amazes and depresses me, but ah well. The we have the music listener. The 'elitist.' The ones who want a genuine article, the ones who will be 50 years old and still listening to things they did when they were 25 because the reasons they're listening have to do with emotional attachment, and a real sense of worth in what they're putting in their brains. These people are hard to reach because they already have all the answers. How am I supposed to relate to all of those types of fans? I'm not! So my job, as a writer about this crap, is to ignore the label's interest, mystically divine the band's intentions, and if honorable, figure out their artistic intentions, and judge how effective they are at accomplishing that within the limits of how well I judge their quality objectively, and their ability to hit me emotionally and intellectually. Attempt to convey the sound (objectively) and the meaning (subjectively) in a way that hopefully somebody understands, and by being a picky prick, the hope is that by me being excited about something, people will figure there's something worth being excited about and investigate things for themselves. That's my job in reviews. To further along your own exploration into this music, whatever your reasons for it. So the huge question that everyone on the streets has to be asking right now is:

What the fuck does all of this have to do with EPHEL DUATH? Because in the grand scheme of things, they just don't fit. Just listening to this thing time and again, I'm pretty well mystified. It makes me wonder exactly what is going on here in this scene where A- a band like this is conceived, B- a band like this is released, and C- a band like this gets on a major indie label. A band on a label that gets people noticed, which will therefore form a schism in the scene as those in the know see their secrets get popular, current scenesters will finally realize the uselessness of corpse-painted bastards being stuck in 1993, and then there will be those that reject this kind of thing outright. SIGH, SOLEFALD, and AND OCEANS will get you in the proper mindset (although not things like new MAYHEM, ZYKLON, MYRKSOG, or KOVENANT for your postmodern black metal mayhem), even if I'd best sum up the band as EMPEROR with dreamy synth. That's extremely simplistic so I'd better explain. The band builds its sound with the not-very-mean-at-all synths and melodic guitar parts over what is usually a complete blowout on drums, a lot of very fast, EMPEROR-ish paced drumming... which is all programmed. Using that to mind-numbing capacity, the best way to describe the music is that it swirls, like some giant hurricane that destroys all in its path... and then the winds calm... and then there you go again for the rest of the storm. More techno bits clash with more acoustic, folksy bits, but there's nothing straightforward about any of the arrangements and the band's just not coming from the same place anyone else is. The vocals are pretty much the standard black metal growling scream, with intermittent 'oohh ahhh' clean vocals that mesh right in so cleanly, you miss them. Pretty much the same with the calmer, dare I say proggy passages because the synth notes are still flying around in their lighthearted manner. But not too much exciting going on in the vocal portion of tonight's program. Because this is all essentially just a reissue of 2000's *Phormula* (yeah, like all of you knew it existed), there's some extras tacked on. The *Opera* demo is here in full, fitting in very well in sound quality (beyond some interesting cymbal sounds and an ambulance siren noise that I can't figure out if it's synth or a scream), totally three tracks. There's also two remix tracks on here but I don't give a shit, there's an hour of good stuff on here so those are easily ignored. Their really-new album is penciled in for a November release at this point, so in the meantime, remember the name EPHEL DUATH when you're trying to figure out what to do with that \$15 burning a hole in your pocket... EPHEL DUATH is not a perfect band, don't let me fool you into thinking this is ultimate metal nirvana. The vocal issue, and the fact that this is a maelstrom of sound precludes the memorable song structures that really make an album an A+ winner. Yet the band makes me think of the past, present, and future of metal, the band excites me, and the band has far more work to do. Great album. <http://ephel.cjb.net>

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ESPECIALLY LIKELY SLOTH *Panda Rescue*

? - ? Audio Savant

Featuring members of SCULPTURED and AGALLOCH (Well, Jason Walton mainly), ELS is reportedly a really wacky and bizarre band that makes truly strange music. However, the CD copy they sent me was rather scratched up so I got to play some of this once several weeks ago and then haven't been able to make it work at all on any of my three players. So I really can't tell you anything about this band. However, in the name of giving a review to anything worthwhile that comes in the door, I took out all of my scratched, unplayable CDs and compared the playing surfaces. ESPECIALLY LIKELY SLOTH's CD had much more imaginative scratch patterns that were thoroughly fascinating and aesthetically pleasing, much more so than all my other scratched and unplayable CDs, causing me to believe the band is indeed cool. 7/10 <http://www.angelfire.com/in2/sloth/>

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LOCK UP *Hate Breeds Suffering*

16- 29:46 Nuclear Blast

Do you like blast beats? Do you like lots of blast beats? Do you like 29:46 straight of blast beats? An 'all star' cast

making music inferior to their main bands (which I won't mention, cause I'm a dick and I don't want to make you care about this band). Blast beats. Yup, this CD's fast. Wow, it's got a famous vocalist screaming incoherently. Hey, the guitar player and bassist used to make music like this when they were kids. And the drummer's fast. Faster than a running antelope. Wait, there's a non blast groove on track 4. Yeah, it's a grind album, pure grind, pure blast, and frankly, it's painted itself into a corner that it can lay down and die in for all I care. www.lockup666.com

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MENTAL HORROR *Proclaiming Vengeance*

11- 49:45 Necropolis

"MENTAL HORROR's burning alive the fags, mediocres, fakes, weak, posers and traitors bring a forth the salvation in pain's form fuck you!" Hello? Is there anybody in there? That quote is inside the (lyricless, thank God) insert, and oh boy, was I just so anxious to put in the CD after seeing that one. At least with the band name, logo, and cover art, there's no mistaking what you're in for, and if you're expecting anything other than full out death metal, you're a fool. If you're expecting a very good class of full out death metal, then you're an even bigger fool. First off, the production blows and the guitars, which pull off genuinely neat riffs and leads now and again, are hardly at the forefront of the sound. When there's a full on solo, it comes through better. The vocalist's low throaty growling is straight from the early 90s, and the drumming is just something else. With LOCKUP, we got blast beats from a guy who knows how to play his drums. MENTAL HORROR gives us continuous, nonstop, brutal blast beats that he just can't handle. Listening on headphones and concentrating just on drums reveals a mess. Blastblastblastblastloseitalittlebitouseanawkwardfillthenblastblastblast. There still does seem to be a misconception in the metal world that bands have. I've said it once, and I've said it a billion times, nobody wants to hear a 50 minute blast beat except a contingent of diehard freaks, and you can probably reach them with a little bit of self promotion without signing your life away to a label. Not that this band is anywhere near as good as fellow countrymen KRISIUN, but the song structure is familiar. Blastblast solo blast blast "Thank you for coming out and supporting METAL!", repeat. But even when I don't like a lot of this blast shit, I'll give a band its due if it is tight and technically impressive. This band isn't. It's complete shit, a demo level band that's released an album because of a record label's quote owed to a distributor. I honestly don't think even the most loyal death metal scenester would sit in his bedroom while this is playing and think "Shit man, MENTAL HORROR should headline Milwaukee this year!" I'd be embarrassed. <http://mentalhorror.cjb.net>

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ONWARD *Reawaken*

11- 54:56 Century Media

ONWARD unfortunately scores exactly the same as DESTINY'S END on my Snooze-o-meter. Let's see. An American power metal band (meaning not concentrating so much on double bass speed songs or keyboards) with a killer guitar player (Toby Knapp was signed to Shrapnel, and they don't sign nincompoops), creating rather ordinary heavy metal songs. It's not that it's wretched, or that I want to turn it off when it's on, or that the fact the band has a record deal is some sort of travesty. The project/band/whatever just hasn't produced anything remarkable. But for two straight albums they rock like it's 1985. It's not overly wanky, not a shredder album, it's song-based, it's just that as it plays and when it's done, you don't have any greater sense of accomplishment than "I've just listened to a heavy metal album. Yay." If you give it a miss, you'll be OK. www.evermoving.com

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SKYMNING *Artificial Supernova*

9- 59:13 Candlelight/Blackened

Didn't this used to be a black metal band? Eh, I don't know, but SKYMNING nowadays is more of a... mechanized riff monster. There is a cold, deliberate quality to their work which definitely works as far as

harshness, but I'm not exactly sure what the band's trying to accomplish. Each song swirls around at that midpace, strong riffs and solid beat behind it as it moves from song to song... but it's lifeless. There's a threat of electronics throughout, but it just manifests itself as harmless background effects and percussion most of the time. But the focus is on being 'futuristic', like some sort of old FEAR FACTORY with the energy sucked straight out of it, which is the best comparison I can make and it isn't complimentary. The vocals are reminiscent of the black metal rasp, a bit lower pitched than is typical, but nothing exciting going on there at all. Don't know the lyrics but with songs titled Inner Cosmic Experience/Inject the Spirit and Shadowed/Astral Silver, I'm inclined to think the lyrics aren't at all crap, but whether they make real sense is a question I can't answer. Bottom line is, it's competent and boring and I certainly wouldn't recommend it. Too methodical for me and not enough surprises or captured energy. <http://welcome.to/skymning>

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SOURCE OF TIDE *Blueprints*

13- 54:29 Candlelight

Atmospheric 'what do you call it?' metal is coming out of the scene's ears right now and I'm loving it. One of the bands coming in the back door of the movement is Norway's SOURCE OF TIDE, combining metal riffing, melodic keyboards, modern electronic elements, and a schizophrenic front throat to deliver something away from the usual. Keyboards are heavy, of course, as one of the failures of the genre is to produce songs and segments that can be carried by guitar only. The thing has at its heaviest this SAMAEL feel, and I really think that *Passage* album is really an influential album in the metal scene far beyond what it's given credit for. Thankfully Blueprints isn't near as stiff as that, and opens up in a lot more directions, but the basic drums and guitar feel, I think SAMAEL. The keys especially are far more fluid. Electronic 'industrial' elements pop in here and again in far more than a passing manner. It's difficult for me to ignore them, because I simply can't like such things, but they don't overrun the worthwhile things going on. But in the middle it gets real un-metal what with the full on beats and female narrator type and military march style. Lord PZ, also of PECCATUM, gives an absolutely befuddling performance, sounding like the bastard son of Martin Walkyier and Cornelius Jakhelln (SOLEFALD) when he's imitating Dani Filth, adding in Vintersorgisms, plus lower growls. Sort of. Nobody can say he gives an unoriginal, lazy, or boring performance, that's for sure. If I were him, I wouldn't do those high pitched screams so much, but damn, it's striking at least. Anyway, it's not the new super amazing duper killer of an abstract metal disc, but more like what I wish the 'average' metal band could be expected to be going for. Better and more unique than the debut, but not quite where they need to be yet. www.source-of-tide.net

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THY PRIMORDIAL *The Crowning Carnage*

9- 43:17 Candlelight/Blackened

After all the weird black metal hybrids and offshoots being dealt with today, it's good to see that there's still some bands putting out stuff that's easily pigeonholed, categorized, and judged. It's black metal, produced well (Abyss/Tommy Tagtgren) and keeping the mid to fast paced, at its most energetic resembling MARDUK and otherwise being somewhere around midperiod SATYRICON, basically. On one hand, it's very hard to fault the guys for doing what they do well, on the other hand they simply can't generate the kind of excitement over their metal that bands doing this kind of thing were getting five years ago. I really don't know where they can go from here, seeing as the 'true black metal' thing is a dead end creatively, and the band doesn't seem to have the will to weird out and just flat out change like just about all of the innovators of the sound they're still tooling around with. This band's got four albums out now, and they've established themselves as certainly not-bad players in the game, but the championship game's already been decided and the crowd's gone home. <http://come.to/thyprim>

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TIMO TOLKKI *Hymn to Life*
12- 60:30 Nuclear Blast

This is a complete turd of an album, a real reeking piece of garbage, yet it is an album where a respected and popular musician is getting away from his main band's stale sound and releasing something very personal. So not only is this a complete bottom-feeder of an album, swimming around with the dried piss and used condoms at the bottom of the outhouse ditch, it's a tragedy on display. The main problem? Tolkki sings. He can't fucking sing. He can't do it. He's crap. Yet here he is, giving it his all, creating that kind of embarrassment felt at the family reunion when Uncle Harold comes back from the restroom with a wet line down the leg of his pants because he forgot to shake. The only good thing about this is it doesn't sound like a STRATOVARIUS album. Not because STRATOVARIUS albums are bad things, but we all know STRATOVARIUS has only about three songs they've been writing for many years now, just sticking different vocals on them and calling them separate tracks. These songs aren't more of that. This has some heavy points, but nothing sustained. It's a light rock album, basically (some heavy points, for sure), built on a more pop mode where the vocal lines are all important. Not my favorite style to begin with, I'll grant you, but that things this *wrong* are released is proof enough for me to believe that there's no benevolent God in this existence. Timo's had some rough points in his life, believe me, I can fully appreciate that fact, and the need to purge the demons. No disrespect intended at all for the personal nature of this album, but someone else really needed to sing it when the decision was made to bring it all to market. The opening strains of Little Boy I Miss You, with the piano, acoustic guitar, and Timo, poor guy, singing over it might be one of the painful and silly sounds ever (mis)marketed to a metal audience. Damn power ballad even gets worse when it gains the power portion of it, as Timo can't sing. Repeat after me. Timo Tolkki can't sing. And Timo Tolkki singing a love song to his lost childhood or whatever is no-adjective-strong-enough bad. Most music reviews are totally subjective, but I promise you, if any words I ever have written or ever will write can ever be taken as objective, absolute, universal law, then this is: This isn't quality material. This isn't "I don't like this style so I'll poo-poo it," this is heinously awful. Dear God, It's Xmas Morning, and Fresh Blue Waters, all performances that should be taken out and shot. Michael Kiske on Key to the Universe is better, he can hold a true note, but his clear as a bell high notes somehow clash with the more subdued music below, and he doesn't raise the standards at all. The only spot of hope is the song Are You the One, because it's one of these light in the loafers songs but has Sharon Den Adel of WITHIN TEMPTATION singing, and it works. The song's fine, in fact I'd say the song's spectacular at achieving what it needed to. Another effective song, that I wouldn't go so far as to call it good, is Father. The first part is quite heavy and vaguely Sabbath, but Timo's not singing so much as spewing venom and hate and what a family that must have been to visit years ago. Then he lets out this scream as it gets calm, and OK, it's disturbing. That song worked. The title track features this Bizarro John Galt speech, sampled from who knows where, that's the biggest hippie/socialist statement I've ever heard since that John Lennon Strawberry Fields Forever bit of anti-individualist, communist propaganda. I guess it's some political speech from whenever, that sounds good until you think about it logically. It claims democracy, but I think complaining about violence and then rallying soldiers for the cause... this is philosophically iffy. To top this disaster all off, we have the most preposterous artwork to ever see the light of day. Upon a desert made of puzzle pieces is this magical oasis, in the middle of which is a magic floating gem, and over it all are two huge hands holding what looks like a fetus in glowing amber, like it's some sort of radioactive insect from the year 40 billion BC. Nevermind the fact that in the middle of this desert of dry and cracked ground are found a swan and goddamn antelope, but also coming upon this scene are two people... one a little boy in T-shirt and jeans (with a dirty butt), just the kind of thing you see in the

desert all the time, along with the child molester looking mulletman wearing a tie dye shirt, jeans (with a dirty butt)... the artist had the wherewithal to realize at some point these guys would have sat down and gotten dusty butts but doesn't realize you don't find deciduous plant life in a desert oasis? Or floating gems and 40 billion year old ambered fetuses either, but hey, I didn't paint this shit, and sneakers. They are both looking at this oasis, likely wondering "Where did these antelopes come from?" OK, in all fairness, some antelope are indeed desert animals, but still, of everything you could ever put in the middle of this mystic scene of ambered fetus, the have antelope. It strikes me as quite odd, so therefore, this is The Antelope Issue. Sound ridiculous? Two reasons why The Antelope Issue isn't ridiculous. One, I could have called it The Ambered Fetus issue. Two, nothing is so ridiculous sounding as *Hymn to Life*. Atrocious, and if there will be a worse album released this year, I pray to all the Metal Gods that it doesn't reach me.

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Already Available
CANVAS SOLARIS *Promo 2001*
3- 15:21 Independent

Talent from Georgia isn't so easy to come by at all, and it's always good to see it come across my desk. A musically superior metal band, as in technical, CANVAS SOLARIS built their appeal on interesting instrumental arrangements, leaving behind conventional song structure, yet thankfully never being truly extreme and dizzying enough to waste the material in a blur that you can't pay attention to and savor at the moment. It really reminds me of prog rock, just superjuiced up to real extreme metal standards of sound, with those kinds of jazzy flashes that made the CYNIC type bands appealing, melodic leads that remind of IRON MAIDEN, and musical passages where the instruments are battling it out on tape for supremacy before our very ears. This isn't overtechnical wank, though. It's ideas put together and intelligently constructed, bridged smoothly so most transitions sound completely natural. And yeah, the vocals are none too exciting, but honestly, it seems silly for them to bring in another vocalist, because there's not too many vocal parts to these songs so I guess the death metal vocals of the guitar player (the new vocalist-only does appear on track one) would do. They're not bad, just... space-taking. I get the feeling that the band would be much better as an instrumental trio, but then again they'd go absolutely nowhere in this business without a vocalist. Or maybe get a more versatile vocalist and/or spend the time on vocal arrangements that so obviously go into everything else in this band. But for sure the instrumental quality far outshines anything coming out of anybody's mouth. While I think it would be a little bit ambitious to take the best three songs to date that the band has done (at least I hope they didn't put one of their not-best songs here) and immediately compare the band to VOIVOD, ANACRUSIS, or ATHEIST like the band tries to do in their own bio material. If an entire album of this quality would appear, then they'd be well on their way. One to keep an eye on, for sure. For info: cancassolaris@hotmail.com

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Magazine Review
METAL RULES #12

100 Pages Color Glossy Cover

Metal Rules! Magazine has been expanding since day one, an amazing feat in and of itself in this day and age, gaining more and more distribution into the newsstand market. Always much more than the average metal magazine, Metal Rules! has gotten lots of attention for interviewing mainstream actors, having lots and lots of pictures of editor Jeff Rappaport and family, and having the general reputation for not being quite so serious. Well, it's time to really take a look at the thing and figure out once and for all, is this thing useful? Entertaining? Informative? OK, the thing looks professional in its layout for sure, color glossy cover and actual white paper for the inside pages, no newsprint crap here. The covers are usually cool to look at, but this issue's cover shot of FORBIDDEN's vocalist is probably the most unappealing cover photo I've ever seen in my life. This is the issue

covering Thrash of the Titans, but really, out of the entire night, there wasn't a single photo taken that could portray some more metal energy, something that looks cool, something that expresses the fact that metal does indeed rule? Nothing against Russ Anderson or whatever performance he may or may not be able to give today, and pardon me for being all Tiger Beat here in caring about looks, but Mr. Anderson alone on the cover with a trippy purple background is not going to make this magazine fly off the racks. Shouldn't care about the cover so much, but damn, it's ugly. Issue opens up with the editor's page, and Rappaport certainly shows that the whole thing's not a joke, talking about the September 11 incident and how it hit close to home, throws in some gay anal sex jokes, and a bunch of miscellaneous stuff. It does the one thing that really drives me nuts about the magazine, it changes font sizes between columns to make the column fit neatly on the page. A minor thing, but makes it look a bit disjointed. The cover feature, a report on the August 11 Thrash of the Titans show, was contributed to Cat Butt in My Face writer Shoshannah Flach, who's been a metal fan in San Francisco so long that she remembered seeing all these bands the first time around. Not only was the choice of writer here brilliant (how many reporters at this event had seen all these bands playing the crappy local shows back in the 80s, as opposed to the occasional tour date wherever they might have grown up?), but Cat Butt is a zine with a very personal focus, so it definitely fit in with the informal Metal Rules! style of coverage as well. (Hey, this Nuclear Blast ad is pretty funny. "BENEDICTION deliver another fatal blow for UK death metal." How right they are.) The descriptions of the entire day before the shows, dealing with press passes and such, being in the club ahead of the paying crowd, I know all these things well, yet who knows exactly if the general reading population would be as excited. If they're not, fuck em, this seems to be a thorough journal of the day! From the trashing of HEATHEN to experiences talking to Tom Araya and expressing annoyance at Jeff Hanneman's callousness towards his child in a Metal Maniacs interview (people still read that thing?), Spongebob Squarepants, going down to the press room and free beer, etc. A rundown of all the bands is included, and definitely this is the best article on the subject out there. As for the interviews gained that day, well, uhm, they suck. DEATH ANGEL (best of this bunch), FORBIDDEN, SADUS, and SLAYER were talked to during this fest, and the conversations are shallow and while I don't doubt they were fun at the time, short interviews at the site of a hectic metalfest aren't going to be any good. The prepared interviews outside of the setting of a show are quite cool. The telephone interviews anyway. ILLDISPOSED was obviously done by email and it's no good, IRON FIRE was the same way, and aware of the nature of Metal Rules!, completely hammed up their interview. ONE4ONE, just all little silly bits. But enough of the bad. There are some amazing interviews in here. For the mainstream entertainment interview, JERKY BOYS' Johnny Brennan gets the thorough, dig deep treatment, and as always Jeff gets all the cool stories, the inside info. Great stuff. I have no idea how he schmoozes these guys so easily, getting them to open up like that. On the music side, WATERDOWN gets the in depth treatment, but the true stars of the interview portion are the STEVE HOWE and DESTRUCTION interviews. Extremely thorough, and the stuff which makes this magazine well worth the \$4.95 asking price. There are also 22 pages of CD reviews, covering just about every facet of metal out there. The reviews have a lot of joking, and sometimes odd judgements, but the fact is, in all that, they manage to succinctly sum of the overall sound of the CD and what it's all about. Succinctly. Damn. I need some succinctivity lessons, for sure. Good and informative stuff, and the field is so wide open, you're going to read about a lot of stuff you haven't even heard about. I did. Add in some more editorial comments, reader mail, and various fun stuff (hey, it's an ad for LotFP Weekly!), and what you have is a magazine that's certainly worth reading. Fun, informative, and you'll just completely scratch your head wondering how Jeff Rappaport gets so many Hollywood insider interviews... Available at

newsstands all over the US, or at
www.metalrulesmagazine.com

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Reader Comments

HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE

I just got LotFP 11, and I must say many thanks for the mighty praise! Our next LP will be done on April 6th...Of course, we are still unsigned, so who knows when it will actually come out... In other news: Janis has left the band. The real story on this is that she has been lured away from us by mega pop-star P!NK... She's already been on Jay Leno, Saturday Night Live, etc. I suppose we could wait till P!NK goes the way of MILLI VANILLI, and get her

back (she has said that she will always play with us, when she's in town, which she won't be for a long time), but I'm not comfortable with waiting, and I'm not comfortable with pop cooties (sponsored by Sketchers!?) either. I'm wondering if you may have any ideas, we are willing to import the right talent, as axe-wielding divas don't exactly grow on trees. Yeah, we could get a bass player and have a separate female singer, but then we'd be another one of those bands with four dudes who do all the work, and some forlorn looking chick standing there on the side doing nothing through half the set, know what I mean? I know you have never seen us live, but the four piece/multi vocal dynamic was one of the coolest things

about our show... Again, any leads/suggestions would be greatly appreciated! Anyway, that's the news from our camp, hope all is well, and thanks again!

John Cobbett/HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE
www.hammersofmisfortune.com