



LAMENTATIONS  
OF THE  
FLAME PRINCESS  
FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE  
1998-2003

*Hammers of Misfortune*  
Kayo Dot  
cathedral  
JAG PANZER DEATH  
in the woods... MACHINE  
THEOCRACY  
ProgPower IV Review  
LotFP's The Best of 2003!

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### Editor's Whine

First: Yes, there was a careless numbering fuckup. #64 came out before #63 because of a computer crash causing me to rush more than usual. I decided to release them with out of order numbering because in two years it's going to be easier to explain that than explain why there isn't a #63 at all. This issue is to be considered #63.

And it's been five years of LotFP. Originally this was to be out in mid-October (oops), but then I was late, then I realized my anniversary issue was going to look like any other issue, so I said hell with it, it's going to be a double, which caused some delays as well. And then more delays. Sorry for the tardiness, longtime LotFP readers are used to it, but I'm sure all the new subscribers from ProgPower who plunked down money for future issues are impressed as hell with me, eh?

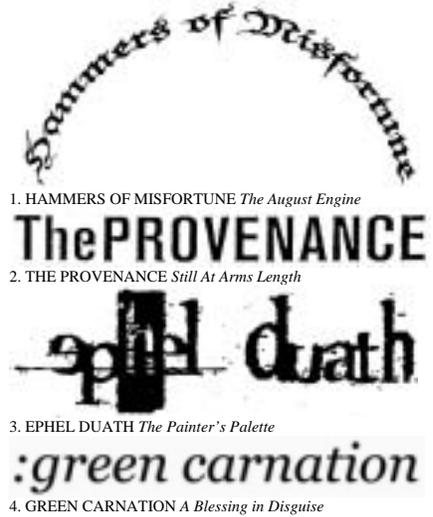
### 2003 Lotfp awards

All awards are judged based on personal listening experience to full CDs. As of this writing, there are 235 CDs released in 2003 that are on the LotFP shelves, with an unknown amount having just passed through. Just in metal, I'd estimate that there were at least five times that number of albums released this year, maybe more, and who knows what was out there that went unheard that would have rocked these awards. Just thought I'd throw out a couple of disclaimers before I go off about 2003...

Note that there are no categories for specific types of metal such as 'best power metal album', 'best death metal album', etc. There is too much room for disagreement as to what style certain bands belong to and I just don't need the headache.

Since this is the third year for these awards, I must note that if a band was considered for an award last year, they will not be counted again unless they do something measurably different this year.

best album

- 
1. HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The August Engine*
  2. THE PROVENANCE *Still At Arms Length*
  3. EPHEL DUATH *The Painter's Palette*
  4. GREEN CARNATION *A Blessing in Disguise*



5. ENSLAVED *Below the Lights*



6. SOLEFALD *In Harmonia Universali*



7. WHILE HEAVEN WEPT *Of Empires Forlorn*



8. KAYO DOT *Choirs of the Eye*



9. MÖRK GRYNING *Pieces of Primal Expression*



10. DIE APOKALYPTISCHEN REITER *Have a Nice Trip*  
**2002 Winner** BLIND GUARDIAN *A Night at the Opera*  
2002 Second Place PAIN OF SALVATION *Remedy Lane*  
2002 Third Place AGALLOCH *The Mantle*  
**2001 Winner** HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The Bastard*  
2001 Second Place NOVEMBRE *Novembrine Waltz*  
2001 Third Place OPETH *Blackwater Park*

best song



1. HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *Doomed Parade*  
2. PHARAOH *Solar Flight*  
3. SOLEFALD *Mont Blanc Providence Crow*  
**2002 Winner** CATHEDRAL *Empty Mirror*  
2002 Second Place PAIN OF SALVATION *A Trace of Blood*  
2002 Third Place ARCTURUS *Nightmare Heaven*  
**2001 Winner** LILITU *I Can Not Be Saved*  
2001 Second Place BLIND GUARDIAN *And Then There Was Silence*  
2001 Third Place SOLEFALD *The USA Don't Exist*

best cover art



1. Set<H> *Sumerian Daemons*  
2. Sascha Ehrich *Have a Nice Trip*  
3. Monika Edvardsen *Orgasm*  
**2002 Winner** Thomas Ewerhard *Expanding Senses*  
2002 Second Place Travis Smith *Resurrection Through Carnage*  
2002 Third Place John O'Fathaigh *Folk-Lore*  
**2001 Winner** Jan Saudek and Vant *New Obscurantis Order*  
2001 Second Place Mark Klinnert *Rain of a Thousand Flames*  
2001 Third Place Martin Hanford *Atlantis Ascendant*

best overall | packaging



1. NEGURA BUNGET *'n Crugu Bradului*  
2. Mauro Berchi *Of Empires Forlorn*  
3. Alf Svensson *Have a Nice Trip*  
**2002 Winner** Thomas Ewerhard *Expanding Senses*  
2002 Second Place Travis Smith and OPETH *Deliverance*  
2002 Third Place Sadetta Postareff and Mike Vuoto *Where the Shadows Lie*  
**2001 Winner** Lorraine Rath *The Bastard*  
2001 Second Place MAUDLIN OF THE WELL *Bath/Leaving Your Body Map*  
2001 Third Place Christian Ruud *All Flesh is Grass*

best production



1. Anssi Kippo *Hate Crew Deathroll*  
2. Dan Swanö *Alive Again: The Breathing Shadow Part IV*  
3. Rowan London *Elegant... and Dying*

**2002 Winner Waldemar Sorychta** *Serpentine*  
 2002 Second Place Charlie Bauerfeind *A Night at the Opera*  
 2002 Third Place Hiili Hilesmaa *The Cold White Light*  
**2001 Winner Endre Kirkesola and Terje Vik Schei** *Light of Day, Day of Darkness*  
 2001 Second Place FALCONER *Falconer*  
 2001 Third Place MADDER MORTEM and Pete Saether *All Flesh is Grass*

best male vocals  
**:green carnation**

**1. Kjetil Nordhus** GREEN CARNATION  
 2. Dan Swanö NIGHTINGALE  
 3. Tony Kakko SONATA ARCTICA  
**2002 Winner Eric Adams** MANOWAR  
 2002 Second Place Mathias Blad FALCONER  
 2002 Third Place Kristian Andren WUTHERING HEIGHTS  
**2001 Winner Harry Conklin** JAG PANZER  
 2001 Second Place Daniel Heiman LOST HORIZON  
 2001 Third Place Derek Bonner LILITU

best female vocals  
**THE GATHERING**

1. Anneke van Giersbergen THE GATHERING  
 2. Monika Edvardsen ATROX  
 3. Emma Hellstrom THE PROVENANCE  
**2002 Winner Stefanie Duchêne** FLOWING TEARS  
 2002 Second Place Monika Edvardsen ATROX  
 2002 Third Place Johanna DePierre AMARAN  
**2001 Winner Michelle Loose** BRAVE  
 2001 Second Place Agnete Kirkevaag MADDER MORTEM  
 2001 Third Place Astrid Van Der Veen AMBEON

best extreme vocals



1. Niklas Rudolffson RUNEMAGICK  
 2. Jonas Bernt MÖRK GRYNING  
 3. Spiros Antoniou SEPTIC FLESH  
**2002 Winner Paul Kuhr** NOVEMBERS DOOM  
 2002 Second Place Jimmy Pitts SCHOLOMANCE  
 2002 Third Place Alan Averill PRIMORDIAL  
**2001 Winner Mikael Åkerfeldt** OPETH  
 2001 Second Place Jorgen Sandstrom THE PROJECT HATE  
 2001 Third Place Taneli Jarva BLACK LEAGUE

best lyrics



1. John Cobbett *The August Engine*  
 2. Cornelius Jakhelln *In Harmonia Universalis*  
 3. PHARAOH *After the Fire*  
**2002 Winner Paul Kuhr** *To Welcome the Fade*  
 2002 Second Place John Haughm *The Mantle*

2002 Third Place Scott Crinklaw *The Immortality Murders*  
**2001 Winner Cornelius Jakhelln** *Pills Against the Ageless Ills*  
 2001 Second Place John Cobbett *The Bastard*  
 2001 Third Place Derek Bonner *Memorial*

best guitar player



1. Herman Li and Sam Totman DRAGONFORCE  
 2. Jon Frauk and Mark Masri DARKNESS REMAINS  
 3. Kostas Karamitroudis DREAM EVIL, FIREWIND, MYSTIC PROPHECY, etc  
**2002 Winner Peter Lake** THEORY IN PRACTICE  
 2002 Second Place Andre Olbrich and Marcus Siepen BLIND GUARDIAN  
 2002 Third Place Carl August Tidemann WINDS  
**2001 Winner Chris and Michael Amott** ARCH ENEMY  
 2001 Second Place Ihsahn and Samoth EMPEROR  
 2001 Third Place Erik Rutan ALAS

best bassist



1. Jonas Reingold KARMAKANIK, etc  
 2. 'Nefarious' MACABRE  
 3. Janis Tanaka HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE  
**2002 Winner Øyvind Hægeland** LUNARIS  
 2002 Second Place Steve DiGiorgio VINTERSORG  
 2002 Third Place Jerry Twyford SCHOLOMANCE  
**2001 Winner Troy Tipton** ZERO HOUR  
 2001 Second Place Maor Appelbaum SLEEPLESS  
 2001 Third Place Martin Furingen LOST HORIZON

best drummer



1. Davide Piovesan EPHEL DUATH  
 2. Gene Hoglan STRAPPING YOUNG LAD  
 3. Per Jensen THE HAUNTED, NIGHTRAGE  
**2002 Winner Thomen Stauch** BLIND GUARDIAN  
 2002 Second Place Morten Sørensen WUTHERING HEIGHTS  
 2002 Third Place Danny Herrera NAPALM DEATH  
**2001 Winner Tino LoSicco** EPOCH OF UNLIGHT  
 2001 Second Place Trym Torson EMPEROR  
 2001 Third Place John Macaluso ARK

best keyboard/synthesizer player



1. Martin Powell CRADLE OF FILTH  
 2. 'Dr. Pest' DIE APOKALYPTISCHEN REITER  
 3. Lars Nedland SOLEFALD  
**2002 Winner Jimmy Pitts** SCHOLOMANCE  
 2002 Second Place 'Sauron' APOTHEOSIS  
 2002 Third Place Tuomas Holopainen NIGHTWISH  
**2001 Winner Lars Nedland** BORKNAGAR/SOLEFALD  
 2001 Second Place Alex Staropoli RHAPSODY  
 2001 Third Place Dan Swanö DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE

best label



- 1. The End Records
- 2. Cruz Del Sur
- 3. Code666
- 2002 Winner The End Records**
- 2002 Second Place Relapse Records
- 2002 Third Place Inside Out Music
- 2001 Winner The End Records**
- 2001 Second Place Dark Symphonies
- 2001 Third Place Spinefarm

best live album



- 1. BLIND GUARDIAN *Live*
- 2. IN THE WOODS... *liveatthecaedonianhall*
- 3. STAR ONE *Live On Earth*
- 2002 No Award
- 2001 Winner NIGHTWISH *From Wishes to Eternity***
- 2001 Second Place HALFORD *Live Insurrection*
- 2001 Third Place DEATH *Live and Raw in LA*

best concept album



- 1. EDGE OF SANITY *Crimson II*
- 2. SOLEFALD *In Harmonia Universalis*
- 3. AGENT STEEL *Order of the Illuminati*
- 2002 Winner NOVEMBERS DOOM *To Welcome the Fade***
- 2002 Second Place PAIN OF SALVATION *Remedy Lane*
- 2002 Third Place STAR ONE *Space Metal*
- 2001 Winner HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The Bastard***
- 2001 Second Place SOLEFALD *Pills Against the Ageless Ills*
- 2001 Third Place AMBEON *Fate of a Dreamer*

best reissue



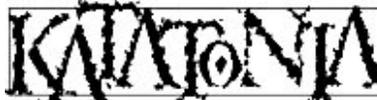
- 1. FLEURETY *Min Tid Skal Komme*
- 2. OPETH *Morningrise*
- 3. DARKANE *Rusted Angel*
- 2002 Winner ARCTURUS *Aspera Hiems Symfonia/Constellation***
- 2002 Second Place The RAGE Remasters
- 2002 Third Place The JUDAS PRIEST Remasters
- 2001 Winner PAN-THY-MONIUM *Dawn of Dreams/Khaoohs***
- 2001 Second Place PRIMORDIAL *A Journey's End*
- 2001 Third Place SENTENCED *Amok/Love and Death*

best album of 2002 that nobody knew about until 2003



- 1. GORDIAN KNOT *Emergent*
- 2. MADDER MORTEM *Deadlands*
- 3. ANDROMEDA *II=I*
- 2002 Winner WOLVERINE *The Window Purpose***
- 2002 Second Place SLEEPYTIME GORILLA MUSEUM *Grand Opening and Closing*
- 2002 Third Place ROOT *Black Seal*
- 2001 Winner VINTERSORG *Cosmic Genesis***
- 2001 Second Place WITHIN TEMPTATION *Mother Earth*
- 2001 Third Place ALCHEMIST *Organasm*

disappointment of the year



- 1. KATATONIA *Viva Emptiness*
- 2. VOIVOD *Voivod*
- 3. FALCONER *Falconer*
- 2002 Winner DARKANE *Expanding Senses***
- 2002 Second Place TRAIL OF TEARS *A New Dimension of Might*
- 2002 Third Place OPETH *Deliverance*
- 2001 Winner EVERGREY *In Search of Truth***
- 2001 Second Place CATHEDRAL *Endtyme*
- 2001 Third Place INTO ETERNITY *Dead or Dreaming*



From the Ystejam mailing list by way of the official ProgPower site, written by Paul Cashman:

"Speaking of NIGHTWISH, I'm not sure how many people know about the back-story there - and I didn't know what was going on until a half-hour before their set. During their set, right before Walking In the Air, they introduced a guy on stage from San Diego and dedicated the song to him. His name is Marc Brueland, and it turns out that he has a rare form of liver cancer and literally has only a few weeks to live. His dying wish was to see NIGHTWISH live, and he got his wish... barely.

Glenn told me he was totally in tears when Marc got up out of his wheelchair on stage-right and started to headbang. He'd been bedridden the entire day and barely made it there for the show. (His dad came forward to steady him a few minutes into the song.) I know the band was extremely touched by the situation: at one point Ewo, NIGHTWISH's road-manager (and

who basically -is- Spinefarm Records) turned to Marc and said exultantly "One more song and then we're Walking in the Air!"

This is one of the untold stories of ProgPower, and as for my part, my sponsorship of NIGHTWISH is that much more meaningful, now. Toward the end of their set (just after I took the photo of Glenn H. and Marc on the side of the stage) I said to Glenn, "It's really cool to be making dreams come true for a lot of people, here," and Glenn said "I'd be happy, if I weren't already crying...."

I'm getting a little teary-eyed m'self, thinking about it now."

Marc passed away October 25.

Now that all of my ranting and raving has been rendered completely insignificant ahead of time by more important consideration... fuckers.

Metal to me is a personal, introspective experience, which is most effective on a stereo in one's own home. Not on a stage with over a thousand screaming people in attendance. I've got some serious problems recognizing the fact that success often hinges on a band's live performances, but variables like volume, surroundings, and song selection are far beyond my control. Putting on a discman at full volume on random shuffle while pushing my way on the train during rush hour is about the same thing, isn't it?

At least ProgPower had a non-smoking auditorium. I went to see LACOMA COIL (awful, awful, awful, awful, boring, and awful) and TYPE O NEGATIVE (Petey Steele really needs to give up music and pursue his true calling... stand-up comedy.) at the Masquerade and after all the smoke and shit, I was sick the next day.

So keeping in mind that for most of the festival, I was happy to sit at the LotFP table, or shop, while listening to the more-than-adequate sound system out in the lobby (seriously, the sound was great out there), here are the official LotFP observations on ProgPower IV, which invaded Atlanta on September 5 and 6, 2003:

REDEMPTION made me realize that Bernie Versailles has never been who I thought he was in AGENT STEEL. Seriously, I thought he was the bald guy with the weird shaped head. Instead, he's a longhair that still looks like he's twenty. The question I have about REDEMPTION... does seeing them live add anything to the musical experience? Not at all. It's a hobby project up on the big stage, with a Ray Alder guest appearance. I like the band and CD fine (and if you can track down a copy of the ProgPower IV program, I have a great interview with lead guy Nick Van Dyk in there), and as an opener they were fine, but I'll keep to the CD, thankyouverymuch.

MERCENARY was the surprise of the festival. You'd think I would have had a good handle on them, considering I was fronting some of the money for their little visit here. Nope. I was unprepared. That the band was heavy as hell and quite aggressive, I expected that, and half-expected the band to get booed for it, but what

do you know, these people actually enjoyed having some honest to gosh metal on the bill. What floored me was the lead singer, Mikkel. Incredible energy, incredible voice, and the clean singing was much more up front than on CD. If you told me that ahead of time, I'd have feared they were watering things down, but a great singer will always be better than a good growler (just like a great growler is always better than a good singer), and this band's got both a great singer AND a good growler, and the two of them working in tandem made this one of the better sets I've ever seen from anybody, ever. They didn't compromise their death metal elements for the ProgPower crowd at all I think. It would be absolute madness for Mikkel to have toned anything down when he's capable of commanding a crowd like that. The only complaint I had was his attempt to get people to pogo. Oh dear. Still, he was such a ball of natural energy on stage that this didn't seem all *that* contrived. From their *Everblack* album and a couple off of their yet-unreleased album, it's so obvious this band should be up where SOILWORK and IN FLAMES are now. The sounds aren't a million miles apart, except MERCENARY keeps rooted more in metal than jumping on more mainstream trends, but the issue with the more popular Swedes is that when adding melodic vocals, it's the growlers doing those melodic vocals, and it's so obvious that 'singing' isn't their forte. MERCENARY keeps things decidedly metal, and brought in an actual, real, talented singer when they decided they wanted singing on their albums. What a concept, eh? This band needs more attention than it's getting. This was seriously a command performance and they just blew the roof off the place.

VANDEN PLAS is boring. I didn't watch a single second of their set, but again, the sound system out in the lobby was quite adequate and... yech. It's like music made of fog that the wind's blowing away. Absolutely nothing to it, light, cheesy, just... I can understand in theory why someone might pick up a MORTICIAN CD and want to listen to it. I can understand in theory why someone might pick up a DARKTHRONE CD and want to listen to it. I think both bands are utter garbage and always have been, but each projects a single idea with such force that anyone receptive to that one idea is really going to end up with their entire discography on the shelf and a couple of T-shirts in the closet. I am at a complete and total loss coming up with a reason why VANDEN PLAS has even one fan. Yet there was a full auditorium, going nuts for the band. This is exactly the kind of thing that spawns elitist, arrogant, critical behavior in the first place. This band is wretched.

NIGHTWISH is one of those bands that you feel like you've waited your entire life to see, even if their first album was only out in 1997. They certainly didn't disappoint as they were all in fine form. I suppose I could think of about ten thousand, two hundred and fifty one songs that might be better suited for the band to cover than Crazy Train, but it did give us a chance to witness Marco Hietala's simultaneous singing/bassing/smoking technique. Tarja was a total angel of course, in all white, and even had a couple costume changes as the night went on. Overall, good

show that didn't disappoint which is saying something since they were the most anticipated band of the weekend.

SYMPHONY X was yet another band I didn't watch too much of. Saw them once before, on this same stage as a matter of fact. SYMPHONY X is an excellent band who perform a most excellent stage show... in small doses. Can't argue with Russell Allen's voice or Michael Romeo's guitar playing, but after a half hour, going on to the end, you get this big déjà vu thing going on as they have a lot of stuff that sounds quite similar.

PAGAN'S MIND are dull. It's just that whole unoriginal prog metal thing that bugs me, you know? People who sit around practicing their instruments so they can show off anything you want from them. Except a new idea. Good as a low mental investment opener though.

SECRET SPHERE must have been somebody's idea of a joke. I mean, they're my idea of a joke. I had no plans to see them (I'd been bored shitless by their 'masterpiece' album *A Time Never Come*, and when I found out their new album had songs like Virgin Street 69 I gave up) and was sitting at my table in the lobby while their ItaliEuroCrap played in the speakers... when Matt Johnsen and Mark Gromen insisted that I had to see these guys. I'm sorry I listened. Somewhere between QUEEN and the VILLAGE PEOPLE on the testosterone meter, this band was seriously an embarrassment to anyone who takes music seriously. Zebra-striped spandex was only the beginning of the list of offenses against good taste that this band flaunted. Fun? Perhaps. Crap? Absolutely.

CIRCLE II CIRCLE were a highlight band for many, and I could see why. If you like later SAVATAGE material, then music written by SAVATAGE members and fronted by the until-recently SAVATAGE singer is going to give you more of the same. *Watching in Silence* really isn't bad, and it's miles ahead of *Poets and Madmen*, and the guys could really give a show. No complaints from me at all. The highlight of this set was the appearance by SAVATAGE's own Jon Oliva, who took some time off of his important and exhaustive drinking schedule to stumble up on stage and ruin a few SAVATAGE classics. His voice simply could not have been worse. It would have been fine for an 'added attraction' if he just did one song, but no, he had to be on stage for a few. What I wouldn't have given for someone offstage to have one of those giant hooks... But CIRCLE II CIRCLE is a SAVATAGE satellite with no pulse or direction of its own. Period. So even if Oliva had puked on the front row, it's not like he was going to get yanked off stage. That wasn't quite as humorous as the firing/quitting of all the CIRCLE II CIRCLE members not named Zakk Stevens a couple of months later, as it fits in with the 80s rock bullshit like the uneasy interview I did with Zakk for the PP Program (you could smell the 'I am a professional rock artist' vibe off of him over the phone) as well as all of their stripper girlfriends that were running around with

them at the show. But yeah, the album and the performance were pretty good.

EVERGREY were another that I gave a miss to. Their last two albums have been way below their potential, the last time I saw them (PP 2.0!) left a very poor taste in my mouth, and going into the auditorium to watch their set would really count as self-abuse at this point. Again, it was a case where the crowd packed the place in (leaving a very comfortable and people-free shopping area, thanks!) and the band is doing very well for themselves... and I'm very happy for them... as long as I don't have to hear it. My girlfriend loves the band, and watched the set, so I asked her to do a writeup for the mag since I didn't have anything. Are you ready? "It was good."

RAGE had all sorts of problems, some out of their hands, and some by their own hand. As the 'unknown headliner' (having released about a hundred albums and only one released in the US in the past decade with little publicity) performing last during the weekend, they suffered from maybe half the crowd deciding to leave before their set. That's fine, and it's also all of those people's loss. RAGE is a three-piece from hell that kicked the most ass of anyone on the bill this year, playing far more towards full-on thrash than power metal. It was an attack more than a performance. Victor Smolski is one of the best working guitarists on Planet Earth right now, and I think he easily outperformed Michael Romeo, the acknowledged guitar god of the fest. He just made everything seem so damned easy. Mike Terrana was a sick bastard behind the drums, looking like he was destroying everything. Again, this wasn't a drum performance, it was assault and battery on the drums. How many bands do you know of where the drummer is the most active member of the band? And of course Peavey on bass and vocals tying it all down. The band had an unfair advantage over most of the other bands in that they had more songs in their catalog to choose from, and there are hardly any weak spots in that catalog to begin with, so the band played monster song after monster song after monster song. That's where they succeeded. The problems... Well, there was some moshing, which was a problem because A- One of the idiots was ramming people who had no interest in the moshing, and B- Moshing is officially prohibited in the festival. I assume there was some security in the room (not that I looked, I was watching the band), so why this was allowed to continue has to be questioned. The floor had thinned out enough to where nobody was going to just lose themselves in the crowd. The idea that a fan who was being inconvenienced should have had to disengage from the show to scout out a security guard isn't right either... because they'd either be complaining to someone who already saw it and ignored it, or they'd realize there's no security in view which is unsettling either way. Still, it's not like there was a psycho with a knife running around. It was some moshing for a heavy band. The disturbing part was the lax enforcement of rules... I agree with the no moshing rules 100%, as it allows fans of the music to be up front. If you're moshing, you are not paying attention to the music, you're just being an asshole. Period. But next year, if it's advertised as no moshing,

then nobody that attends should have to worry about it, and there shouldn't be complaints needed to deal with it. Damn, I hated to just take that much space and make this seem like a major issue, overshadowing the band's performance, but there's only so many ways to say things like "Don't Fear the Winter kicked ass and Terrana was a maniac and Smolski ruled it and Peavey is cool!", you know? The problem during the RAGE set that RAGE brought down on themselves is the solo section. Smolski got to show off his guitar skills for a few minutes. OK. The guy's deserving of the Guitar God title. He didn't sit there and just do neoclassical runs up and down his fretboard, he actually did some slower stuff and out-of-metal exercises. So far so good. Then Mr. Terrana proceeded with his drum solo. Which... never... ended. That ended my ProgPower weekend, because I just couldn't take it anymore. It went on, and on, and on. He could still be at Earthlink Live *right now* banging away at them damn things for all I know. If you have like sixteen or seventeen albums (I can never keep track with this band and they were playing stuff from their yet-unreleased new album as well) and you've never played the States and you don't know when or if you'll be back, why in hell are you doing solos instead of songs? There was one sick son of a bitch (hi, Neil!) that rode his bike from Chicago to Atlanta and back (journal at [www.gregie.com/neil/bike/tour/](http://www.gregie.com/neil/bike/tour/)) with RAGE as his prime band of choice... would he have been better served with two or three more actual songs, or with the solos provided? I know what my answer is, and I just had to walk down the street to get to the show! Argh. But anyway, great, great band and if don't have any RAGE in your collection, you are totally out of the loop...

So, the vendor's tables. Purchases were not planned beyond NAPALM DEATH's *Noise for Music's Sake*, BLIND GUARDIAN's *Live*, and EDGE OF SANITY's *Crimson II*. I did go up to the Century Media table and asked Jeff Wagner, "What do I need here?" Ended up with WATCHTOWER demos, Ron Jarzombek solo stuff, VAUXDVIHL's *VOG*, and an OBLIVEON anthology. I'd asked Ken Golden from Laser's Edge to bring some dark, sick prog for me. He didn't even have most of it out for sale, it was just for me, me, me, and it was GOBLIN's *Suspiria*, ISLAND's *Pictures*, JACULA's *Tardo Pede In Magium Versus*, MAGMA's *Mekanik Destruktiv Kommandoh*, PRESENT's *Certitudes*, PULSAR's *Halloween*, and UNIVERS ZERO's *Heresie*. Never heard (of) any of them except for the GOBLIN. Maybe I'll cover them next issue...

How adventurous are you when buying your CDs? Just wondering, because the problem of dreadfully unoriginal bands flooding the market is indeed market driven. Stop buying it and it will disappear. I hunger for sounds I have never heard before. I want the same feeling from a band that I got the first time albums such as *Forest of Equilibrium*, *Utopia Banished*, *Morningrise*, and *Nightfall In Middle-Earth* really sunk in and changed the way I thought about music. That doesn't mean I want more albums that sound like those. Just the opposite. I will completely reject albums that do. I get so many bad albums every month that it drives

me insane. If I'd just get three or four good albums a month, I'd be far more enthusiastic about music and writing about it, than the current scenario where I get three or four good albums and sixteen or seventeen useless albums. You want to know why the writing here is often cynical? Or late, for that matter? Blah releases to the point that I like finding bills in the mailbox more than an envelope with a CD in it because I know at least the bill is something necessary in my life. Frankly, I think for the most part the heavy metal promotion machine has completely and utterly failed when it comes to getting good music to fans. We've been over all this before in LotFP but it is important to constantly reinforce that point. It's amazing that I'll have been given around two hundred and fifty albums by record labels and bands looking for publicity, but so many of the albums (but certainly not all of them) I actually listen to on a regular basis are ones I had to search out and purchase myself. Hearing similar stories from writers who work for publications far larger than mine blows my mind. It is completely understandable for smaller labels with more experimental bands to not have a budget for a massive publicity campaign. What is completely mindblowing are the number of 'critics' and 'journalists' who will write whatever reviews they will, but when it comes time for those year end best-of lists, it's always the bigger names that get their names on the top of the lists. Who is serving who here?

Yeah,, end that rant.

The LotFP recommendations for ProgPower V:

The mix of bands was pretty good this year. Some harder stuff, some fluffy stuff. Maintain. I realize that any fest where all of the bands meets LotFP approval would draw like five people so I'm not concerned with liking all of the bands... just concerned that a wide variety of sounds are represented.

Start the festival at like three in the afternoon, meaning you end before eleven at night, at least on Saturday. That should make maintaining crowd energy throughout the night much easier, and perhaps avoid the mass exodus of exhausted fans that plagued PAIN OF SALVATION last year and RAGE this year. You can probably count the number of people who show up after they get off work on one hand, so the only inconvenience suffered by doing this is the crew who has to be there pretty early a couple of days, and the bands who have to be there early one day. When talking about heavy metal musicians and crew, maybe it's way too wishful thinking to be scheduled to start soundchecking at 9am, but it should be the fan that gets the greater consideration...

Demand an appearance bond from every band. If the band has a drum solo in their set, they forfeit the bond. If they are a smaller band that can't afford the appearance bond, make it a contractual stipulation that every band member will have needles stuck in their eyeballs if there is a drum solo.

Decide if there is to be moshing allowed or not. If there is not, then security should be aware of this fact and

they should act without crowd complaints when the situation comes up.

Sign **HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE** as an opening act.

## Feature Interview

# cathedral

*One would think that after five years of LotFP, I wouldn't be all nervous about approaching someone for an interview. Yet when Lee Dorrian was walking between the tour bus and the venue during a tour date for the CATHEDRAL/STRAPPING YOUNG LAD/SAMAEL tour, I froze. I mean come on, it was LEE frickin DORRIAN, in the flesh, right in front of me! This had been a long time in coming. Sure, I'd talked to Lee Dorrian in 1999 for LotFP #3, and bored the hell out of him as I went through a point by point interrogation of their entire history. But this was different. He was RIGHT THERE. The last time I showed up to see CATHEDRAL play, it was in 1993 when they opened for MERCYFUL FATE. Unfortunately, that partnering didn't last long and when I found out CATHEDRAL wasn't on the bill anymore, I sold my ticket and went home. Don't worry, I saw MERCYFUL FATE later on, with SOLITUDE AETURNUS opening and dominating. But CATHEDRAL was scheduled to be in Atlanta again, ten long years after the last time they were supposed to be here. TEN FUCKING YEARS. I mean God damn. New forms of metal have had time to be hatched, escape from the egg, get popular, get overdone, and die, between the time CATHEDRAL should have been here last and when they finally showed up. But now, there I was, at the venue at some ridiculously early hour of the afternoon, watching Gaz and Lee walking around. I freaked. I admit it. Sue me. So when I finally approached him, instead of being a large man almost into his 30s speaking to another adult, I was a little teenage boy begging for attention from one of his heroes. On one hand, how embarrassing can you get? On the other hand, isn't that the coolest feeling you can have? I was invited onto the tour bus to do the interview (and it was a clean bus! Woot!), but we'll get to that in a bit. It was the show, man. The show! You have not been doomed out of existence until seeing EBONY TEARS- live. Hopkins. Midnight Mountain. I was against the stage, using it to brace myself as I headbanged as I never had before. My hair whipped over my face hard enough to snap against my throat and I swore I was going to puke... but I kept on to the beat... Harder, harder, harder... thankfully the set wasn't any longer than it was because I was going to either puke or pass out. At the end of it, people were coming up and saying \*I\* was cool with the display of flying hair. I've never gone that nuts at a show before... it felt pretty good. And it was because CATHEDRAL is just that good, their songs are just that massive, and CATHEDRAL are one of the great metal bands of all time. And I finally got to meet, and talk face to face with, Lee Dorrian. Man oh man... that rules.*

**So how has the US been treating you so far?**

Good, yeah. We haven't been here in so long. The last time we toured in America was 96. Since then we've just done that New Jersey Metalfest once, which was a bit chaotic. But this tour's been really cool, it's a really good package. Every band is different, we all get along, the crowds have been good. People seem to dig us. I've got no complaints.

**On the last two albums, you've gotten more serious than maybe the previous two albums. Do you agree with that? What's been happening with the band as far as that goes?**

I wouldn't say more serious, just a bit more... up until *Caravan Beyond Redemption*, we started getting seen as this kind of quirky band. People seemed to pay more attention to the little adlibbed things rather than the overall actual music. We just got tired of being seen as a band with wit. We still have that in us, but we don't want that to be the overriding thing that people see in us. When we did the *Endtyme* album, we wanted to go back to what the band was in the first place, and rid ourselves of the clichés that have built around the band and start all over again. Go back to being really heavy. Not to deny the albums we'd done up to that time, but we just wanted to do something really fresh. We felt we could do that, break it down, strip it down, and start all over again. We've always been deadly serious about our music, it's not like that's changed, there's just not so many quirky parts on the record as there was the previous album.

**I hate to put it like this, but it used to be that you'd release a serious album, then a quirky EP, serious album, quirky EP. But then later on the albums, like on *Caravan Beyond Redemption*, you just went more lighthearted lyrically.**

To a certain extent. Some of the lyrics on that album were really dark. We do miss doing those EPs, because those EPs were a real release of things you couldn't really do on the album. On the albums you have to be a lot more focused, a lot more specific I suppose. When we did those EPs, they were more random and off the wall, there were no rules. Whatever we came up with in the studio, is what we would record and release without any fear. We haven't had the chance to do an EP like that in quite some time. But we do miss those.

**When hearing something like *Voyage of the Homeless Sapien* or *The Devil's Summit*, you can't help but smile.**

Good! You're not meant to sit down and frown and go, "These guys are having fun!" We are just as much about having fun as we are serious.

**What do you think of the description doom metal?**

I'd say we're more doom than anything else. All these things that came about like stoner and all that kind of nonsense. We were playing what we play before that term was even invented. To be lumped into that kind of category kind of got off our backs a bit. That's maybe another slight reason why we did *Endtyme* as well, to destroy that conception that people had about us. I don't know, we're just a riff based rock-metal band I suppose. We're not trying to be anything different from what we actually are. The music we make is what we love. It comes from SABBATH, it comes from punk, it comes from a lot of different background areas. It's got to be the stage now where there's so many genres and categorizations of what is essentially heavy metal

music. The more categories you have, the more stupid it becomes. I don't care what category something's in. If I like it, I like it. Labels are for boring people, I think.

**It's definitely useful for describing things. If you said for this tour, "Oh, it's three heavy metal bands," that's not going to say much to anybody.**

Twenty years ago, if you said there were three heavy metal bands, there would be three heavy metal bands. But now you've got all these subgenres of other genres, and genres of this and that, and I don't really care about all that. As long as the music's good.

**You have done some label hopping the past few years. If you could go into that?**

We were on Earache for quite some time. We did six albums with Earache, and I've personally been involved with Earache since 1987. That's a long fucking time, really! Our time had just run with them, really. I think they wanted to keep us, but they couldn't afford to pay the advance on our contract, and we just thought if they can't keep us in that respect, then it's time to try something elsewhere. We got offered a deal from Dreamcatcher which was pretty good on paper, but then that didn't really work out, so we just signed with Nuclear Blast, which is pretty cool I think. From what I can gather, they are quite a powerful label, so if anyone can give us a push I'm sure they can.

**How come no 'best-of' has happened for you from Earache yet?**

That's a political thing. We have a clause in our contract that says they can't release something like that without our consent to the artwork and stuff. We want to do one and eventually we will, but it is kind of political.

**Have you seen the NAPALM DEATH one that just came out?**

I've seen it but I don't know what's on it, I haven't analyzed it or anything.

**As far as the latest album, *VIIIth Coming*, anything behind the title besides the fact that it's your seventh album?**

The original title was going to be Phoenix Rising, but it was a bit too obvious if you look at the artwork. Obviously the first song on the album is called that. It's a play on words, like the second coming of Christ, who's to say Christ existed in the first place? Who's to say he only came back once? We're just saying the seventh coming. But essentially, it's our seventh album and seven is supposed to be a lucky number. And the band's been around for such a long time, we've been together for thirteen years, and I guess people don't even realize we've got seven albums out so it's kind of a statement in that respect.

**Has the seventh album been lucky for you? It's been out about a year...**

It's done reasonably well from what I can ascertain.

**Tell me about *Empty Mirror*.**

That's actually the last one we wrote. I wrote the lyrics while we were in the studio. At first we weren't going to use that riff because it's a real SABBATH riff and we thought people might think it's a really obvious CATHEDRAL track. At the end of the day, when we got it together and constructed a song out of it, I thought it was the most catchy riff on the album. Lyrically it's just about looking at yourself in the mirror and asking what have you done with your life? How far have you

gotten? Sometimes when you feel really down, it feels like a reflection of emptiness, and it's analyzing how you got to that stage, where you just feel empty and debased, trying to work out the reasons why you felt like that. It's not a negative story as such, just more of a realization or awakening kind of thing. You have to analyze where you go wrong in life to make sense of all that kind of shit.

**Musically I love how it's a normal song then just goes off into this doom thing.**

Drops off, yeah. That was important. I've always like songs that had a groovy verse and then dropped right down into doom and I think that song was crying out for it, really. It was a bit commercial sounding until that bit comes in the middle. We wanted to contrast the overall vibe.

**Well you have had catchy songs all along, you haven't just been sludge.**

We are a song-based band. Most songs have verse-chorus kind of ideas. We're not one of those bands that just plays a song for forty-five minutes with two riffs in it just for the sake of being extreme. There's no point in that. For CATHEDRAL. I like some of that sometimes. I think we have a lot more ideas and want to throw as many ideas in as we can, without going too far away from what we're about. You mentioned songs like Devil's Summit, that's why we would never put that on an album because that's way far out of what we are as a metal band. But it is an element of what we like.

**Just a few months ago, I finally got the *Our God Has Landed* video. I've never seen any of those videos before. *Midnight Mountain*, I know it's ten years ago now, but what was the mindset behind that video?**

That's when we were on Columbia Records. For that song, I think they said they wanted a disco video. So we said, 'You want a disco video, we'll give you a fucking disco video.' It was filmed in the most nightclub in London called Stringfellows. We just went over the top with it. The record company said they wanted a disco video, they got it.

**What did the record company say when they saw it?**

I think they were confused by it. Obviously, they were trying to break the band quite big. I guess the Ride video was more slick... I didn't like the video at all, really, and we had to get a friend to edit it and take a lot of stuff out. There was maybe a bit of sarcasm on our part, because we didn't like how the record company was trying to tell us to be. Maybe that backfired on us, doing a video like that, because we gained one back on the record company, but then we realized people that listened to our music and bought our records would see it. It was a brave thing to do! A lot of metal bands at that time were in the videos just with their arms folded, frowning, wearing all black and looking mundane, I think. We had to prove we can enjoy what we do as well as be serious.

**You don't find a lot of metal bands with those... disco influences, I guess.**

It's still essentially metal at the end of the day, there's some funky parts to those songs, but it's still heavy.

**I just embarrass myself with visitors in my house trying to dance when *Midnight Mountain* is on. It is embarrassing!**

<laughs> I don't think it's embarrassing at all! I think it's more embarrassing just to be afraid of what you feel

inside. If you're going to just frown at everything to be cool, that's fucking boring. If you want to go dance to a song, go dance to it. What's the problem?

**The problem is I can't dance.**

I have that problem too and I'm in the fucking video!

**You've got an editor, man.**

We didn't want to set any boundaries around us at that time. When we did the first LP, that was very extreme, ultra slow, one dimensional. We'd all been in bands prior to CATHEDRAL where we felt trapped in what we were doing, musically. We were determined to not have that happen to us again with CATHEDRAL so we made a conscious effort to try to keep expanding our sound and our ideas and our identities, that sort of stuff.

**Did you think you'd be here over ten years later?**

I didn't think we'd be here after one year! When we did the first demo, ultra slow heavy music was not popular. There were one or two bands like AUTOPSY that played those parts in their songs, and bands like the MELVINS were around, and TROUBLE, but no one was out and out slow and extreme like we were. And coming from a band like Napalm, I just didn't think people would get it at all. Which they didn't at first, I don't think, but sooner or later they did, and people picked up on us. We're still here! It's not been an easy ride by any means. It's been a struggle to get this far.

**One of the most powerful songs you've ever done is Reaching Happiness, Touching Pain. When that flute part comes in... If you're in a down mood, you totally lose it.**

I find that one hard to listen to these days, actually. The lyrics are a bit bleak.

**Whose idea was the flute?**

I think it was Gaz's idea. Listening to a lot of 70s prog bands, I think that gave us the idea to bring a flute player in.

**I read an interview with you in Requiem magazine way back, and you mentioned a band, MELLOW CANDLE. I went and got the Swaddling Songs album, it's the most light thing ever but it's really cool.**

I love that album. That's one of my favorite records ever! I'm not really big on folk music, I just think there's something quite magical about that record. I love the singing, and the lyrics as well.

**There's a lot of 70s stuff that's messed up and great from the 70s that nobody knows about.**

There's endless amounts. You can go on for the rest of your life just discovering new old stuff, you know what I mean? Without sounding bloody retro, I just think most music from that time is just better than a lot of stuff that comes out now. It's less uniform, less contrived, just more free sounding. Now everything is just too clinical and regulated.

**You can tell exactly who bands want to be.**

It's fucking boring. There are great bands around but they are just so swamped out by copycat bands. Maybe that's an age thing. Maybe if I was fourteen I'd be into the most extreme, crazy, badass shit that was out there. But when you've been in a band like NAPALM DEATH and have heard it a million times before, it ceases to impress you.

**When you think of old NAPALM DEATH, and then see STRAPPING YOUNG LAD on stage, who is**

**more extreme? The NAPALM stuff you were involved with, or STRAPPING?**

I would say NAPALM. Without any disrespect to those guys, they are extreme, but I don't know if they're about being extreme. NAPALM was a lot more stripped down, a lot more punk influenced, a lot more gut level and political I suppose. And for the time that NAPALM came out, I'd say it was more extreme. I don't necessarily say better, but it was more extreme.

**And chaotic. STRAPPING is a lot more clean sounding.**

And that's how NAPALM turned out, the production is a lot more articulate and clinical. When we were together, we were just four punk kids making a racket. That's before there was money to actually produce records. That's what it was all about. Go to the studio, plug in, make a racket, and go home. It wasn't two or three weeks working on drum sounds or four days working on the guitar sound, it was like, 'There's the drum sound, hit record, there's the guitar sound, let's go!' Three days and we're out of there. Things have changed a lot since then.

**What confuses me are the BBC sessions that you guys did for the Peel show. Everything sounds a lot clearer than what was on the albums. Is it just because you were in the BBC studios? I can't imagine you would have had more time to work there than...**

Oh God no. We did all that stuff in like half a day. A bigger studio, nicer studios. The first Peel sessions, it was chaos! The drums, the cymbals were not gated, so the cymbals were just flying everywhere. That's my favorite, that first Peel, that's the crazy stuff. The producer on that was a guy that used to be in MOTT THE HOOPLE, Dale Griffin. We got there, and he just didn't have a clue what the fuck was going on. We played the whole session about four times, going through all the songs and stuff, and he says, 'Can we have a song now?' We just played the whole session four times! He's like, 'Yeah right, yeah right. Can we have a song?' When he realized we were serious, he was just standing there like 'I don't know what the fuck to do with this.' So he just recorded it. The speed of the drums was so fast and the vocals were so extreme, I think that's the first time he'd heard anything like that.

**How was the band received when the albums started coming out? Now, it's impossible for any new band to get attention, but I have the feeling that the band put out an album and absolutely everybody was going, 'What the fuck?'**

It wasn't just the metal scene that picked up on it. The indy scene in England, magazines like New Musical Express and stuff, they picked up on NAPALM. At shows there would be punk kids, indy kids, a few metallers, it was a really mixed bag. Now, you've got so many types of death metal, black metal, grind, whatever, but back then it was all new. Essentially, it was through John Peel that the band got any recognition at all. He totally exposed NAPALM in the early days. He used to play that Scum album to death! A good three or four months before the NME picked up on it. That was the biggest thing that ever happened to me, being played on the John Peel show. From the age of ten, eleven, I used to listen to John Peel every night, on a transistor radio with an earpiece in! I discovered

everything about music through him. He was my living bible or something as far as music went. So to actually be acknowledged by him for being in a band, was pretty wild for me. One of the biggest achievements ever!

**About some of the other projects you've done, are you planning on doing more or...**

If they happen they happen. I just did the track with Dave Grohl on the PROBOT thing. I did a song with these guys called PSEUDO HEROES, they're like a punk band from Florida. The TEETH OF THE LIONS thing, as I was saying early, CATHEDRAL is not going to do a forty-five minute track with two or three riffs in it, but that's pretty much what TEETH OF THE LIONS is! It's pretty extreme in that respect.

**O'Malley's crazy.**

But he's awesome.

**How was it working with Paul Chain?**

Fantastic! Paul Chain is a very eccentric guy in many ways, but also a very intelligent, very humorous kind of guy. I stayed at his place a couple of times. He's a musical genius, and getting to know him was one of the highlights of being involved in music. I could go on for hours about some of the stories with that guy...

**Does he do his vocals improve, or does he plan all of that out?**

Some of the songs actually have a couple of words. A song like Kill Me, you can hear that, but the rest of it is completely improvised, yeah. People in Italy don't know if he's singing in English, and people in England don't know if he's singing in Italian!

**You seem to alternate using Dave Patchett or not on the past several albums.**

It's only on the *Endtyme* album that we didn't use him.

**The US version of *Supernatural Birth Machine*...**

That wasn't our idea. He is inside though. But the front cover, that's fucking awful, man! That was pretty much all Earache stuff. We wanted to use him for *Endtyme*, and in fact the Japanese version does have a Dave Patchett cover. The Japanese record company paid him direct to do that. Earache, understandably, didn't want to spend as much money as it would cost. Dave spends a lot of time working on those sleeves. The minimum fee he's going to want is two and a half grand, and people just don't spend that much on record covers anymore. Earache dropped the ball on that one and didn't want to spend the money, so we got Stephen to do that one. I think he did a great job on it.

**What is it about you wanting to make the lyrics on your albums hard to read?**

That's Steve O'Malley there, on the last two anyway.

**You did it on *Ethereal Mirror* as well.**

The spiral. I write a lot of those lyrics in the studio, so I don't have time to live with them or anything. I kind of thought that I didn't want them to be there in black and white. I wasn't one hundred percent with those lyrics at the time because a lot of them were spontaneous. No big deal. I think layouts are quite boring if they're just block, block, block. As long as you can essentially read them at the end of the day... It makes you take more time to actually look into it.

**When should we expect new material?**

We haven't started on new material yet. Probably when we get home, we're going to start rehearsing and start writing new songs. Probably late October time. It usually takes us a few months to come up with enough

songs to go into the studio. What we normally do is have one week of rehearsals, go away for two weeks and then come back after listening to the tapes for two weeks with an ideas in our mind and just kind of build on songs over a period of time like that. I think we'll be in the studio by May or June of next year, depending on how the material goes.

#### **Discography**

With CATHEDRAL:

*In Memorium* (1990 Rise Above)\*\*\*\*

*Forest of Equilibrium* (1991 Earache)

*Soul Sacrifice* (1992 Earache)\* \*\*

*Ethereal Mirror* (1993 Earache)\* \*\*\*

*Statik Majik* (1994 Earache)\*\* \*\*\*

*Cosmic Requiem* (1994 Columbia)

*The Carnival Bizarre* (1995 Earache)

*Hopkins (The Witchfinder General)* (1995 Earache)

*Supernatural Birth Machine* (1996 Earache)

*Caravan Beyond Redemption* (1998 Earache)

*Endtyme* (2001 Earache)

*The VIIIth Coming* (Dreamcatcher/Spitfire)

With NAPALM DEATH:

*Scum* (1987 Earache)

*From Enslavement to Obliteration* (1988 Earache)

*Mentally Murdered* (1989 Earache)

With THE TEETH OF THE LIONS RULE THE

DIVINE

*Rampton* (2002 Southern Lord)

With PAUL CHAIN:

*Alkahest* (1995 Godhead)

#### **Contact**

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[www.enemyofthemusicbusiness.com](http://www.enemyofthemusicbusiness.com)

<http://web.tiscali.it/paulchain/>

[www.riseaboverecords.com](http://www.riseaboverecords.com)

[www.southernlord.com](http://www.southernlord.com)

[www.earache.com](http://www.earache.com)

[www.spitfirerecords.com](http://www.spitfirerecords.com)

[www.music-cartel.com](http://www.music-cartel.com)

[www.dreamcatcher-records.com](http://www.dreamcatcher-records.com)

[www.nuclearblast.de](http://www.nuclearblast.de)

\* Originally released by Columbia Records in the US and since reissued by Earache

\*\* Reissued as a combined package 1999 Earache

\*\*\* Different versions of same EP for different continents

\*\*\*\* Re-released 1999 by Rise Above/Music Cartel with live tracks

## Feature Interview

# DEATH MACHINE

*It's three AM before an already delayed and pushed back deadline and I realize I haven't written an introduction to the DEATH MACHINE/ZERO HOUR feature. Where to begin... I guess we have to start with ZERO HOUR. Do you like prog metal? Maybe... no? Good, because ZERO HOUR are the prog metal band you're going to like anyway. Technical, cold,*

*intimidating, and powerful music is what they offer, impeccably done and never to be mistaken for anything other than a metal band. It's the good stuff. DEATH MACHINE has all of the musicians from ZERO HOUR (minus the vocalist) taking different names and playing a far more brutal kind of metal, that threatens to become death metal at any moment but never hits any of those stylistic clichés. It's all very interesting and refreshing in a world where all the brutal bands are either stuck in 1991 or are some offshoot of hardcore. I've interviewed guitarist Jason Tipton for a ProgPower program before, but not for LotFP itself... and that just had to change.*

#### **DEATH MACHINE.**

Right on.

**That's not something I expected from you after hearing the ZERO HOUR stuff.**

I hear you on that. What was nice about doing this project is that it was different than ZERO HOUR. We like bands like MESHUGGAH, FEAR FACTORY. Just a lot of the real heavy bands. The singer came up and approached us to do a project with him, and we agreed to do it after two years of him bickering at us. It just seemed like the right time to do something.

**There seems to be this divide between more extreme musicians and musicians who deal with 'progressive' music. Why do you think that is?**

The crossover for us, we always liked really aggressive music. I think with ZERO HOUR you can hear that. A lot of progressive metal bands are lighter in their music. We've always wanted to be heavy. Listening to MESHUGGAH, even if you got technical like CYNIC with the death vocals. I'm into jazz music as well, it just seemed the right time. I really enjoy heavy music when I'm working out or driving in my car, so it was just like, "Let's write a really heavy album and have fun with it!"

**Who exactly is in the band? There is this mix of real names and not real names...**

Thrak is myself, Jason, and then Troy is Devin. Mikey, the drummer from ZERO HOUR, is also in DEATH MACHINE, Elias on keyboards and Kirk is the vocalist. **Between the changing of the names and the band photos, this comes off as a joke project.**

It did start off as a joke. To be honest, we weren't even planning on recording the music. ZERO HOUR was under down time, and all of the sudden we decided to write some songs and play out because Erik takes a long time with the vocals. We kind of just sit there and think, "What are we going to do now?" We love playing music and we love playing live, so we went out and played live with this act. Suddenly, we had this big buzz going around the band and we had two to three hundred people a show! We wanted to do the costumes, we wanted to go under different names, because we didn't want the ZERO HOUR fans to think this is ZERO HOUR number two. We just wanted to do something else without people thinking we were leaving ZERO HOUR. We're not. We love ZERO HOUR, and we love doing DEATH MACHINE. All of a sudden, with all the response and people starting to contact us, we went in and recorded five songs. We were number two on local radio, on the biggest radio stations in the Bay Area, we're getting booked on really good shows. This is crazy! Labels started approaching us, and we thought we'd just finish up an album. So we did that, and we

were talking to some labels. We'd dealt with Ken [Golden] in the past, he's been really good to us, always gets us our royalty checks. I've worked with him before. I knew what the contracts were going to look like, I didn't have to worry about bringing a lawyer in, because we'd worked with him before. It worked out great, now we have the finished product, and we're happy about it.

**How did you convince Ken to release this? He's never had anything like this...**

He always said he wanted to try a band like this on his label. He's into MESHUGGAH as well, he likes some of the hardcore things like LAMB OF GOD, KILLSWITCH ENGAGE, which we're all into as well. All of a sudden he says, "What are you guys planning to do with this?" I don't know! We were shopping it, showing it to some labels, he didn't even know we'd done it. He wanted to listen to it, and he was driving home from ProgPower, and I guess him and Scott McGill were digging on it. He asks, "Would you maybe want me to put it out?" I never approached him because I never thought he would think about doing that! He was interested, and it seemed like the right thing to do.

**So you are the first and only band on Sensory Dark.**

That's pretty tight.

**Gotten any complaints from the usual prog metal listening crowd?**

It's one of those things, when you see what we're wearing, people assume it's a nu metal band. We're not a nu metal band. Some people they hear ZERO HOUR in the music! A lot of people for that matter! That wasn't our intentions or anything, but I guess when you have three guys from ZERO HOUR, you're going to get that sound in DEATH MACHINE. Luckily the response has been pretty good. You get some die-hard Zero Hour fans that are maybe worried that the band is going to break up if DEATH MACHINE does well, they think it'll be the death of ZERO HOUR so they can't support DEATH MACHINE. It's nothing like that at all. We tracked the ZERO HOUR album *De-Evolution*, finished, in March. Erik is still doing his vocal tracks! I would hope people wouldn't blame us for wanting to keep doing music, and we've already written half of the next album for ZERO HOUR past *De-Evolution*! I'm just like, why should I write the rest of the album when the singer hasn't finished *De-Evolution*? Luckily people have been really cool. We did a show at the CD Warehouse, and we did the Halloween show where we headlined at the Campbell Gaslight. The response was fantastic! At the end of the show they wanted an encore, it was great! The kid who is our soundman comes up. I felt so sorry for him, he had to be nineteen years old, he says, "I'm sorry, you guys went over your set, we have to close up." No problem, man! I started taking my guitar off and you could hear nothing but boos throughout that whole crowd. It was the greatest feeling! We have fun doing it, people say they love coming out watching our live show, and they feel it sounds great on CD but they say we sound better live. That's pretty nice.

**When you're making the differentiation between what you do and nu metal, I agree you're not nu metal, but people seem to want to deny there is a connection between extreme metal and nu metal. Half of it was people excited about the downtuned**

**death metal guitar sound! Where is the line drawn for you?**

I don't know. You hear so many different genres being put together. I hear a lot of these bands say they're progressive. When I think of progressive I think of a lot of odd time signatures, long compositions, tempo changes, key modulation, going into different key component parts in your songs. You have these bands who say they're progressive and they don't do any of those things! I don't know what nu metal is. If you say KORN, is that a nu metal band? Or LIMP BISKIT. We sound nothing like those bands, and I presume those are nu metal. Then you've got MESHUGGAH. I don't classify MESHUGGAH as nu metal. They have kind of a nu sound but they still sound like they love SLAYER. Those real hard bands. LAMB OF GOD would be a good example. I hear a lot of SLAYER riffs in there. I hear GRIP INC, and things like that. I don't know where the line gets drawn. Maybe our look is nu metal, it was meant as kind of a joke. My brother is the comical devil, you know what I mean? He's just always all over the place, he cracked our singer a couple of times and he was bleeding all over the place, which makes for a great show. I'm this death metal looking guy. Elias sort of has that nu metal look with the baby doll heads. We did it as, "We're going to go out, have fun, and entertain people with some really cool music." I don't know how you differentiate nu metal. I'm sure you'd do a better job of that. Do you think MESHUGGAH is a nu metal band?

**No. They can play.**

Yeah. Yeah. I like MUDVAYNE, I have to be honest. There are some great songs like Prod, where the song is ten minutes long and they do all these changes and time signatures, and they sound progressive to me. But some people would say that's nu metal, which freaks me out. You hear the bass player doing all of these fretless runs, and they're doing things in seven and thirteen, and that's progressive. I don't hear KORN doing that! There's a lot of great players. DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN, I guess they're considered hardcore, but they're very technical. I would think you would tell the difference between a normal hardcore band that sounds like they're screaming and crunching on chords forever, and DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN who is all over the place and you don't know what you're going to get out of them.

**When it's just chunky groove riffs and somebody rapping on the chorus, that's when it gets annoying. Do you think people would have made such a big deal about the nu metal sound if it never got out of the underground? If the top guys were selling thirty or forty thousand copies instead of three to four million?**

I'm seeing the nu metal declining. I just don't think there's much substance in the music, and when they come out with a new disc, it's the same damned disc they put out before. There's only so much you can do with that. Our next CD with DEATH MACHINE is going to be a lot more technical as well. At the time we thought to do something with odd time signatures, polyrhythms, and be really heavy. Now we're going to where it will have more keyboards, but really heavy, and a lot of really odd time signatures and really technical. I think the progressive bands would dig this

disc, the self titled DEATH MACHINE. I think they'll see on the next one we just go full force more.

**You said that people hear some ZERO HOUR in DEATH MACHINE. I would agree. Definitely not clones of each other but there are definitely points that even if nobody told me who was in the band, I'd be going, "Wait a second." It's kind of a compliment in that it means ZERO HOUR is very distinctive.**

That's great. What's nice is that ZERO HOUR can say it has its own voice in prog metal. I can't wait for the new album to come out because we really worked our asses off on that. That's a great compliment.

**How were the songs for DEATH MACHINE put together versus how a ZERO HOUR song is put together?**

ZERO HOUR songs were blood, sweat, and tears all time time. We would just write so much material and we would just throw out a whole bunch of stuff. We were just really meticulous with everything we did. We just came into the studio and said let's jam out some stuff. We didn't repeat much stuff. Of course you had Eyes of Denial and Subterranean which had things that would repeat, but we thought the ZERO HOUR sound is not repeating a lot of things. A lot of the songs, if you repeated things, you could make ninety minutes worth of music! With DEATH MACHINE, we just sat down and said we're going to be really strict and write really kick ass parts. If we were going to do verses, or do choruses, just make sure the stuff was really slamming, that we would really want to hear it again. We wanted to use the seven strings, we wanted to be really heavy, and we had to make sure we really dug the parts because we'd play them again later on in the song, which is something we never really thought about in ZERO HOUR.

**You've got a guitar player, bassist, and drummer, the basis for any rock band, shared between DEATH MACHINE and ZERO HOUR. Did you not think that Death Machine was going to sound like Zero Hour at all?**

ZERO HOUR is always going to be in us. We love that band and we want to bring progressive elements into DEATH MACHINE. I knew it was going to sound like ZERO HOUR a little bit, but I wanted it to be different. Yeah, it sounds a little like Zero Hour, but it's not like you're buying ZERO HOUR number two. This band has its own voice. At least I hope it sounds that way.

**Besides just being heavier, does it change how you put a song together if you know you're writing for a rough or a clean vocalist?**

Not really. We lay down a map where the vocalist can do some cool stuff, and we don't think of whether the guy's singing or he's growling. I always have to like the music first, and it's nice when this does come in, I can help them out because I know where the chord structures are going and where the time signatures are going. Luckily, I listen to bands that have like James LaBrie, or your Geoff Tate singer, guys who have operatic vocals, and I also listen to bands who sound like cookie monster.

**How are the lyrics put together?**

In the beginning it did start off as a joke, we were just going to go out there and have fun with it. Of course, writing the music seriously and stuff like that, but we didn't put any expectations on it like we did ZERO

HOUR. We work so hard with that, and we just wanted something to come out of this. When we did this album, let's not put the pressure on us, let's just do something that we think sounds good and hopefully the labels and everybody else will feel the same. It started out as fun and things like that, but when the crowds came out and started digging our material, that's when it became serious to us. This is a serious band to us. The singer, he was so naïve at the beginning! He said, "All we have to do is go in and record an album!" Dude, you don't know! There was something I loved about him being so naïve that was kind of cool. This business can drain you. You have this excitement, oh yeah we're doing this CD, I can't wait to hear it, and you do that and you deal with the business and it does drain you. They said they were going to do this or that. It was nice to have someone in the band who was so naïve and thought it was so easy! That spark that made him all excited, made us excited. That was cool.

**It's just amazing that something that didn't start off so seriously ends up so much better than people who worship SUFFOCATION and make it their life's goal to make the ultimate death metal album.**

That's awesome, dude! We're not trying to go out there and put out shitty music.

**You've also got the re-release of the first ZERO HOUR album out there. I suppose we should talk about it. What were the advantages to you from having this re-released through Sensory instead of trying to push the old edition yourself?**

When we did the old edition, we printed twenty one hundred copies, and they went really quick. The problem was, we couldn't get promotion because we were doing it all ourselves, and we ran out of money to put out a full length. We had songs we wanted to add onto it, but when you're doing it yourself you just can't do something like that. When you think about the numbers that *Towers* sold and what we had of the self-titled selling, there was a big difference. Every time we would play a show, people would ask me if we had the self-titled. They asked if we were going to press any more. We went a full year of not having the CDs. The people in Europe didn't have them. We brought almost a hundred copies when we went to Europe, and they were gone in two days. We didn't expect that! But they all had *Towers* so it does help to have the label pushing it for you. What was nice is he put the extra songs on there, repackaged the artwork with Travis Smith, and make it an official release. We always wanted to make it an official release. But due to having problems with labels and negotiations, we put it out ourselves. But it's a good thing we did that because it created a buzz for us to get signed with *Towers of Avarice*.

**Looking back on it after a few years, where would you have improved things?**

With the first album, I'm extremely proud of it. That was the start of getting our sound. We came out with the CD we worked so hard with, it sounded really good. When we came out with *Towers*, we had to go that extra level again. We were in a totally different state of mind when we did *Towers*. With all the problems with labels we were dealing with for the self-titled, we were extremely angry with the music business! It came out in our music. We didn't have a keyboard player, and when we were writing we were thinking of keyboards. We

decided to just write with Mikey, Troy, and myself, just something we can max out and not worry about keyboards, and we'll just add the keyboards at the end. As soon as we tracked it and heard it, we decided we don't need keyboards. It would totally lose the vibe we had on it. With *De-Evolution*, we went the next level again I can honestly say. *De-Evolution* is going to be better than the *Towers of Avarice*, and better than *Metamorphosis*. I really believe that. It's got a nice mix. It's really exotic, still heavy in a lot of areas, very technical, but it has a lot of lush, clean parts. People who were more fans of *Towers*, or more fans of *Metamorphosis*, this is the one that falls right in the middle. It's still really heavy, and we have a lot of exotic flavors we're putting in, such as didgeridoo, Troy's playing some fretless bass, some key synth pads that we have. It's going to be tight, man. I'm so excited to get that CD out, and hopefully our singer will get the tracks done so everybody can hear it!

**What takes him so long?**

When we did *Towers of Avarice*, we finished all of our music a whole year before he finished his tracks and it ended up being mixed. So he takes awhile. But the thing is, he had everything written pretty much when we did *Headway* and when we did *ProgPower*. He's going through some issues and things like that, but it will get it done and Erik will do a fantastic job.

**One thing I liked about TOWERS OF AVARICE is that the sound, the entire album was just so cold and powerful. This is it! This is it!**

We worked so hard on that CD. I don't know how much me and my brother were putting the fists up on things. We were fighting all the time on that CD. It brought the best out of us. You're going to really dig *De-Evolution*, it's another concept disc, it's really heavy and cold, has a real depressing story as well. And we like that! But it's going to have some silk to it as well. It's going to be exotic. I don't know if that necessarily means it's going to be warmer. We're a dark band. We like being a dark band. It's just like *DEATH MACHINE*, we like playing heavy, mean stuff. I'm just really excited about *De-Evolution* and thank you for the compliments about *Towers of Avarice* because we're really happy with that disc.

**I'm concerned about the upcoming material. If one of the inspirations for *Towers of Avarice* was being pissed off dealing with people in the music industry, it sounds now like you've got a pretty comfortable position with Sensory if you gave them the old album and the side project.**

We're not satisfied though. Don't get me wrong in things like that. There are definitely labels that wanted the deal with Zero Hour. The problem is, you go through the big dance of, they want samples, and then go a whole year negotiating a deal. I won't name labels, there's a bunch. I remember when we did the self-titled, we received three contracts from [xxxx]. My god, are you guys going to sign us? Are you going to make the changes on the contract? What you hear on the phone verbally is one thing, and what you get in writing is totally different. To be honest with you, with everything that is going on, we didn't want to get into negotiating a deal [with another label] and things like that. We'll see what Ken does for us for *De-Evolution*. If we're pleased, we'll stay, if not, we are open to going to

bigger labels. We've been happy with what Ken has done for us and Ken's been happy to have us on his label.

**What do you think would have been on the sticker if you had gone with LMP?**

Let's talk a little bit about LMP, because who cares? I remember we sent a picture to LMP, and they were interested. We were just wearing our regular outfits. I wear Billabong T-shirts, I'm wearing my jeans. He got the pictures of us, and he says, "I can't sign you, you look like a bunch of street kids. You have to dress up in leather and comb your hair." Oh my god! We took those pictures that we put in the self-titled, he said "Those are beautiful pictures!", but I've never worn that outfit again. I will never, ever, again... if you don't like our pictures... it's about the music for us. Even with DEATH MACHINE, if people are going to be sidetracked by our look, it's entertaining when you see us live, but the music is what it's all about.

**It always seemed like a goofy place at Limb headquarters.**

Other people were nice, but we couldn't get an agreement going, and if we did, what we talked about was different than what was in the contracts. I remember [Shrapnel Records head] Mike Varney. I know so many bands who are so upset with what this guy did to their bands. He would talk behind my back, saying he would have signed us except that we had egos. We didn't have egos, we just said the honest truth to him. He'd ask what we think of a band, and if it was cool, we'd say it was cool. He'd ask about another band, "They're alright." He asked us to change our singer. He didn't like Erik. I was like, "I dig our singer." He said he sounds like every other singer. Dude, you've got a bunch of singers on your label that sound like the guys Yngwie has worked with. Don't tell me that! I dig his vocals! I was standing up for our band. I like Erik's vocals. If I'm wrong for loving what we do and backing up our singer... He always wanted us to change members. What's that crap? And I know people who are on that label who are my friends who are in the same situations with Mike Varney. If you've got a tight unit and are happy with your material and are happy with the singer, stick it out. One label could say they're not into your singer, but other labels could think he's really good. I think Erik's a kick-ass vocalist. Mike Varney, you don't know what you're talking about.

**For a label like Shrapnel, I don't see them as a huge enough label to even produce incredible results if someone did make all the changes to please him.**

He goes in and changes all of their material, too. That was another thing. We had the self titled, and I brought him Eyes of Denial, Voice of Reason, and The System Remains. He says, "I would change that all up. I would change these parts, that part, those parts..." Man, we'd sound like every other band that he's produced. Why would I want to do that? I like our sound. If you're going to pay me a lot of money and bring in a producer, I'll listen to what he has to say. If you're not going to put up anything and come in and produce it... I wasn't going to get involved in that game, and I don't think I was wrong in doing it. It sounds like people liked the self-titled album, so it's cool.

**What is it with the music business? Or all entertainment businesses. How do these people get in charge of anything?**

At the beginning, they do love it for the music, but when they start getting paychecks, they start forgetting why they got involved in it. I don't know, man. You hear a lot of horror stories about labels. I know bands trying to start their own labels, that has to be tough as hell, for a lot of those guys, they go out of business. But these guys [Varney types], they have a way of making things work by getting distribution deals, and other stuff, and they don't care what product they're putting out as long as they're making money. Ken Golden, he really does love progressive music, and he keeps putting out progressive acts. I do think he's a good guy. If you go to Mike Varney's house, he's got a Mercedes, a Rolls Royce, a beautiful house, and his bands have jack shit. There you go.

**If I can get a list of five albums you've been enjoying lately.**

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE *Alive or Just Breathing*, LAMB OF GOD, *As the Palace Burns*. DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN with Mike Patton (*Irony is a Dead Scene*). My student's band, ARTILLERY HELL, they're going to record with Dino [Alden] here soon, and I'm going to co-produce it so that should be cool. The music sounds really good on that. Pat Metheny *Still Life (Talking)*. And I like the new Nevermore.

**Any final comments?**

Just wanted to say thank you to the fans for all the years with ZERO HOUR, and for all the people getting into DEATH MACHINE and writing us really nice emails. Please keep supporting us because you guys keep us going.

**Discography**

With ZERO HOUR

*Zero Hour* (1999 Independent)\*

*Towers of Avarice* (2003 Sensory)

With DEATH MACHINE

*Death Machine* (2003 Sensory Dark)

\* re-released with bonus tracks as *Metamorphosis*, 2003

Sensory

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Feature Interview



*A seven and a half page interview, a three page review, and now I need to write an introduction to the interview that says something different? Who decided that? Anyway, the HAMMERS' first album The Bastard was my big deal ballyhoo of 2001, and I'm proud to say that was put all over the*

*promotional material for the new album, The August Engine. The foursome that created this album, Mike Scalzi, Janis Tanaka, John Cobbett, and Chewy Marzolo, are awesome. They do great work, really. Janis left and was replaced by two women, Jamie Myers and Sigrid Sheie. Concerning the placement of the new HAMMERS as album of the year, I didn't want to do it at first. I thought it would be cheesy to have a band's first two albums each get album of the year honors. But I saw how I put HAMMERS near the top in other categories, and THE PROVENANCE is truly a band where the whole is so much greater than its part... but when running through Still At Arms Length through my head, I truly didn't find myself just mentally cheering as much as I did when running through the HAMMERS album in my head. I really had no choice considering the album took up tons of my time in 2002 when I got the advanced burned copy when it looked like it would never be released, and it dominated my 2003 before and after its release. No choice at all... Interesting trivia: The first phone interview I did with John for the HAMMERS was the evening of September 10 going into the morning of September 11, 2001. Less interesting trivia: I found out about their record deal with Cruz Del Sur when John called in for customer service for his internet connection, and by total coincidence caught me at my day job. Woot! But once the album was finally out, it was time to go into shameless skill mode. I interviewed John Cobbett for a long time concerning the new album. There's your introduction. Now read the interview, read the review, and buy the album!*

**The cover art on the vinyl...?**

I had to do the cover art myself, which kind of sucks. Our graphic artist that we used for *The Bastard* was not available. I guess it came out OK for someone who can't really draw.

**There is an interesting theme on there. Very World War II shall we say.**

The whole idea was for it to look like an old propaganda poster from World War I, World War II. I really dig propaganda, as we're experiencing so much of it these days. I think a lot of the propaganda posters from the 30s and 40s are really scary art, because they are designed into scaring you into thinking a certain way. They're designed to scare you into thinking what the government wants you to think. Make you hate people and other cultures and stuff, and I think that's far scarier than dragons and swords, shit like that.

**Don't you worry that someone might see that and get the wrong idea about the band?**

That was pointed out to me later, about the lightning looking like the SS symbol. I really didn't think about that until somebody pointed it out to me. Basically, what I did was I put some masking tape on a piece of paper, then I dipped a toothbrush into India ink, and did the whole thing with my thumb on the toothbrush, and when I took off the tape it

looked like World War II lightning, and then I superimposed the rest of the images on top of that. It came out looking like... a couple of people have pointed that out to me. It's just supposed to look like a poster from World War II, it's good you got that impression. If anyone is stupid enough to think we a Nazi band, whatever. You can just tell them we're like Kentucky Fried Chicken metal because they're obviously stupid enough to believe anything.

**And the CD cover is going to be the claw from the back of the vinyl?**

There's motifs in the lyrics for this record, and there's this motif about golden birds, and the claw represents that. That's on the front cover of the digipak CD that's coming out. Just the claw on the front, and some birds on the back. I wanted it to look really really simple, really strong. Since I had to do the art myself, I made up a bunch of circular designs in my diary, just in pen and ink, and decided to use one of those for the cover art. They're perfect for a CD cover, because they're really symbolic looking, and since CDs are so small, I thought it would be nice to have a big image that would fill that little five by five space. Just really strong, simple imagery. Eye catching. Good for patches and T-shirts and stuff. So that's going to be on the front cover on the CD, and there's a little drawing associated with each of the seven songs.

... We're going to repress *The Bastard* soon, because you can't find those anywhere. There were only a thousand pressed. They're gone! The distributors don't even have them. We went on a tour recently and I was trying to hunt down some copies, I'd buy them back from distributors just so we'd have something to sell on the road, and I could not find them anywhere. I searched for it everywhere on the internet, all I found were people pirating it. We're going to repress the digipak, but we're also going to press it on gatefold vinyl.

**So what has the band been up to in the past couple years?**

We had to rebuild our lineup. Janis [Tanaka] left to do that whole thing with P!NK. Janis is the most talented musician I've ever played with, male or female. She's pretty tough to replace, seeing as how she's Cliff Burton on bass and Carly Simon on vocals, in one person! But she had to do what she had to do. It took us two years but we finally rebuilt the lineup, we got our two new members, who are Sigrid Sheie and Jamie Myers.

**How'd you manage to find them?**

Sigrid was kind of new in town, she had been playing bass in a band called the MENSTRUAL TRAMPS, but it also turns out that she's been playing classical piano since she was three years old! She was just jamming with us, playing bass, and she obviously wasn't going to be the lead singer, she wasn't interested in it, she just liked jamming with us. So we were jamming with Sigrid,

and we heard about this girl Jamie [Myers] from Texas, she played in a band called LIKE FLIES ON FLESH. And then she played in a band called SOUTH MOUTH. People had been telling us about her for a couple years. SOUTH MOUTH rolled through town, and me and Chewy went to the show and gave her *The August Engine*, *The Bastard*, our phone numbers and stuff. A couple of months went by, and she called back and she moved to the Bay area to join our band! It's pretty amazing.

**That's nuts.**

Yeah. But she was willing to do it, she's been doing a great job, and we went on tour in Texas and she played in front of all her friends and everything. It was great, it was a lot of fun. We now have a Hammond B3 organ and piano to add into our sound too. That's what Sigrid wound up doing. We're not going to be using any cheesy digital keyboard sounds. It took us two years to find the new members, and then it took six months to get ready to play our first gig. Not too bad really.

**Isn't it weird having a new album come out with the lineup different on the album than what you have now?**

Yeah, it's totally weird. But everything we do is weird! It's ridiculous! But what am I going to do, throw the band away? I've got to keep it going. It's weird because we're promoting an album that has no keyboards on it, and we have a different lineup that does have keyboards on it and two new people. It seems to be working out. We've played about fifteen times with the new lineup, and it sounds different than the album, but kind of better. Hammond B3s taking care of some of the guitar harmonies. Where there's three guitars going on in *The August Engine*, we'll have the Hammond taking care of one of the guitar parts. It turns out pretty cool. I suppose we should probably record some live stuff one of these years of us doing the old material with the new lineup. It sounds different live. And both Jamie and Sigrid sing, so we can have female vocal harmonies. So now we have four voices to work with. It's really interesting to try to write for four different voices, organ and piano, and two guitars to work with. There's a lot of different possibilities.

**That's getting a bit ahead of ourselves there. Backing up a little bit, at the end of the day, what was the reaction to *The Bastard*?**

Everybody liked it. There was only one bad review of *The Bastard* that I was able to find, from some Russian guy. He said that we were too weird. I don't think that we're weird at all. We might be weird in the world of metal, but it was just too eclectic for him. That was the only bad review out of all the ones I read. So the reaction to *The Bastard* was great. Everybody seemed to like it. We got that Terrorizer writers' thing, that's pretty good for being on a tiny little label with only a thousand copies pressed with almost no promo. It got a great

reaction I would say. The new one, I've only heard one review of, and it was a good review.

**Martin Popoff from *Brave Words* gave it ten out of ten... ("Entirely something new, and entirely something creatively masterful.")**

That's the one I heard. That's encouraging. I am expecting a lot of people to hate it.

**Why?**

A lot of bands just put out the same album over and over again, and we're not going to do that. This album sounds a fuck of a lot different from *The Bastard*, and the next one is going to sound a lot different from this one. It's like an art project. In metal, there's a lot of closed minded people. I have gotten a little bit of hate mail. Some people really like it, but there are other people who say, "You broke the rules! That's not metal!" I don't have much respect for rules, and I have less respect for people who try to enforce rules on me. Yeah, we're going to break the rules.

**So what took you so long to get a record deal? The album's been done for quite a while.**

Don't ask me, man! We were calling ourselves 'office metal.' We would hear over and over again, "It's a big hit around the office, but there's no way we're putting this thing out." The album is unconventional. It's not what you would call generic. You can't pigeonhole it into any specific style of metal. It's eclectic. That's part of it. It's tough to market it in three words, which is important to record labels. They have to cram all their latest releases onto a single page in a magazine and try to sum it up, like 'Grim Black Metal' or 'Epic Power Metal' or 'Crushing Doom Metal.' You can't sum up *The August Engine* in three words at all. It would be tough to market it in that respect. And since September 11, the economy has taken a dive, people just aren't willing to take chances. Most labels seem to be signing bands that are already established, snapping up bands with proven sales records from a smaller label. Century Media came pretty close to signing us, then told us to put this album out ourselves and then they'll sign us for our third one. So basically, "You guys go get big on your own, and once you're big we'll make some money off of you." It cost us some money to make this thing, and I was basically asking for my money back. We put six thousand dollars into this record. I'm not going to just give it to somebody for less than that. That would be stupid. Then they own that recording! I paid six thousand bucks for that recording and I have to sell it for two thousand dollars? Fucking forget it! But there are a lot of bands out there willing to take a lot of shit from labels. I suppose I could have found a label to put it out, but nothing seemed right to me. Cruz Del Sur came around and he was totally willing to be cool and fair about it. So we'll just go with them. Really easy to work with, everything he said he was going to do, he did. He put up with me being picky about the cover art, he was cool with us being in a bunch of other bands on

other labels. But in addition to being not generic, not really packageable, and the bad economy, after I had contacted every label that I had any respect for that I knew about and got rejected, I just got discouraged. Fuck it. I can't sit here and try to push this record any more, it's just too depressing. Time to start rebuilding the lineup and concentrating on the future. Everything's OK now! It's coming out, better late than never. At the point where we were rebuilding the lineup, I was to just work on that and have this be our lost second album and just start working on the next one.

**So you really think people in the metal scene are going to hate this as much as you say?**

It's going to be a love it or hate it sort of thing. Most people seem to like it, but these are the people already into *The Bastard*. I was expecting more people complaining that it's not like *The Bastard*. But it's barely out. The people that have heard it are mostly up and down the west coast, and in Texas, where we've played. We're playing with crusty metal bands, like WORMWOOD, FALL OF THE BASTARDS, GARUDA, TEEN CTHULHU, shit like that. It hasn't hit the European straight metal scene yet.

**Because it's got all clean vocals, I think it's going to get lumped in with power metal, which will be mildly amusing.**

I stopped listening to metal completely when I was writing. I didn't want to be influenced by anybody. I didn't care how metal the record was going to sound. I just wanted to write good songs. Good music. If it's metal enough for Joe Metal, then great! If it's not metal enough for Joe Metal, then maybe it's good enough songs for somebody that likes good songs! The emphasis was totally on songwriting. The fact that we're heavy players means it's going to come out heavy. But the priority was not making a great metal record. The priority was making a song record.

**The biggest difference between this one and *The Bastard* was the elimination of all the conventional extreme metal songwriting tactics. Blast beats, harsh vocals.**

The thing that happened between *The Bastard* and this album was I formed my own little black metal band, LUDICRA with some friends. LUDICRA does our own little brand of blackened metal and I felt like I wanted to keep HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE as a pure songwriting thing and do all that crazy black metal stuff in another band. I love black metal. I love playing it. But it got a little difficult to employ real songwriting techniques and still feel like I had to throw a blast beat in. I didn't want to have to worry about that shit. Frankly, I'm also tired of doing the harsh vocals myself. It's OK, but I really prefer melodic vocals for the Hammers songs. With the screaming vocals, you can only really express a couple of different emotions. Namely anger and hate. There's a lot more emotions than that out there to express. Clean vocals, not only

do they add melody, but... Listening to a band like IN FLAMES or even WITCHERY, you hear all these great melodies in the guitars, it's really really melodic... I haven't listened to IN FLAMES in years, but this is what I remember.

**Old IN FLAMES has to be what you're talking about.**

*The Jester Race* is the only on I have.

**It's their best one.**

I was listening to that, thinking there are some great guitar melodies here, but all the vocalist is doing is caterwauling. It just seems silly. There's all this melody going on but the vocals have zero melody. Particularly with doom metal, I really prefer melodic vocals. It's much more musical, and it's more emotionally effective to me. Unless what you're trying to get across is anger, hatred, and despair, in which case the screaming is a plus. And that's where LUDICRA comes in. Basically it's suicide metal, so yeah, there's a lot of screaming. HAMMERS is more about songwriting, and there's some more delicate emotions that we explore, it's more melancholy, and a little bit more epic. Like SOLSTICE, have you heard *New Dark Age*? It's one of my favorite albums of all time. Can you imagine that album if the singer was just screaming? It would suck! It would be ridiculous. But a lot of people do that shit. Like on the BURNING WITCH album, they mix it up. You get the point.

**Clean singing in an epic atmosphere like you guys do, there's going to be a backlash against that just because of how big power metal has gotten. People can't seem to differentiate things and put IRON MAIDEN in the same category as STRATOVARIUS.**

Isn't STRATOVARIUS more kind of easy listening? It's elevator metal. It's like Disney. Like listening to The Lion King soundtrack. The lyrics, god, which king are you talking about this time? How many kings have you offered your sword to on this album so far? Fuckin' A, dude.

**Why did you cut songs out of the final version of *The August Engine*?**

Originally we had an hour and a half of music. The idea was to write something of the magnitude of PINK FLOYD's *The Wall*. I wanted to write a huge, huge album. It didn't really work out very well. It didn't work out. The final product was quite long. There were already songs removed from that version. It was getting crushed by its own weight. It was too much information. And there was also one song that we felt the new lineup would do a way better job at, The Church of Broken Glass. It's kind of a power ballad. I love that song! It's one of my favorite HAMMERS songs, but now that we have a piano, it would be a great piano song. We're going to record that with the new lineup on another album. That's why we took that one off. You're one of the few people who have heard both versions [of the album]. The later one is just way more concise.

**I've still got that "there's a song missing!" mental block listening to it.**

On the old version, there was a song that we never got around to giving a title to. There's the song after Rainfall, which starts off with acoustic guitar and builds up into this THIN LIZZY sort of thing, and I think that's the moment that slowed the album down for a lot of people that heard it. Once you remove that song, it goes from Rainfall directly to Room and a Riddle, and bam, it's right back into the thick of the record. It moves the record along at a much quicker pace and people don't have the attention span. You can't write *The Wall* anymore, people just don't have the time for it anymore.

**You're still giving them an instrumental introduction into a slow song.**

The instrumental kicks ass.

**Well, yeah.**

It was originally going to be called Overture. We can't call it an overture any more because half the songs that it quotes were removed from the record! It's not an overture anymore! So we just called it The August Engine Part One.

**Why the name August Engine?**

It's a symbol that occurs in the lyrics, it's one of the motifs in the lyrics. There's other motifs in there too. There was a candle motif, but the other candle song got yanked.

**What was so power about the idea of the august engine that you took it out of the album and put it as the title?**

I could have titled the album any number of things. We thought about titling the album *A Room and a Riddle*. That would be a fine album title. I wanted to call the album *Golden Birds* but everybody thought that was really kind of fruity. I thought with the big threatening claw, it would be more menacing, but nobody liked that idea. *The August Engine* seemed like a really strong title. The word august is not in the sense of the month of August. [Webster definition: Inspiring awe; imposing... honestly, at the time of the interview I thought it meant 'full of vitality...' Whoops.- ed] It summed up the lyrics a little bit better than *A Room and a Riddle*. We just used it. I didn't think there needed to be a title, but you're supposed to name your album.

**Then if you didn't use a title people would have called it a self-titled album.**

We could have named it *Eponymous*. Has anybody done that yet?

**Not that I know of.**

Maybe we'll do that.

**The best song on the album is Doomed Parade.**

You like that one? I like that one. That was the first song written after *The Bastard*.

**Where did you come up with some of those ideas? It's a huge song.**

I was really into doing the same thing with themes, you know how *The Bastard* has themes that recur throughout the album? Doomed Parade uses a lot of themes that I was intending to use again in other

songs on the album. I did a little bit of that on *The August Engine*. That's why there was an overture. It took three months to write that song, and it just came out good. I think the lyrics are good. I wrote all that stuff just on an acoustic guitar, PINK FLOYD or BEATLES style. Pure song writing. You've got your melody and you've got your chorus, write it on an acoustic guitar that way, bring it into practice and start arranging for a metal ensemble. The whole song started with the line, "Here is a wound to go with your uniform," which I thought was a great line, and I built the song around that.

**It goes through so many different passages, so it feels like a giant epic, but you fit it into five and a half minutes.**

It has an intro, a verse, then there are two different versions of the chorus, then it goes into what started as a jam. I just said, "We're going to play twenty-eight bars in A-minor and see what happens." Then it goes into a quiet acoustic part which is a reply to the last chorus that happened, and then it goes into the second verse. I like to mix up the verses and choruses. It's rare for HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE to have a verse or a chorus that's the same each time. The second chorus is going to be different from the first one somehow. The instrumentation will be changed, or augmented, or the vocals will be different. We don't do a lot of Pro Tools editing. In fact, we don't do any Pro Tools editing. If you listen to a lot of metal that comes out nowadays, my god, the engineer will say, "Play the chorus riff once. OK, that's all I need! \*cut and paste cut and paste\*" That's how they do it! You can hear it! It sounds really homogenized and really kind of cold and boring. We have to play through our entire song in the studio because it's all different. You can't cut and paste the chorus.

**I remember before you posted the lyrics on the site, I was going nuts trying to figure out if she was singing "She was here" or "She was real". You're doing both and switching the order.**

And the second time through the chorus she doesn't sing that at all. So songwriting is my main thing. It's all about songwriting, man. I really don't care about being metal as much as I care about playing heavy music and writing good songs.

**So as far as Doomed Parade, I do think it is the best song that you guys have recorded so far, but I also think it has the weakest little bit of a song so far.**

It has a flaw.

**When Mike wails the 'to hell' thing, it doesn't seem convincing. Just seems to be lacking the punch.**

Is your complaint about the vocal performance or the word itself?

**I think it's the performance. I don't have a problem with the idea of that being the line, but... It doesn't have an edge.**

Recording that album sucked. Janis basically skipped town on us the night before we went into the studio. She had her reasons. There were no hard feelings at all, but she had to go. "WHAT? We're going into the studio tomorrow!" So she was gone. Me and Chewy had to do all the tracks by ourselves, and Mike was in school so he wasn't around. It was a nightmare. Chewy had shin splints have the time. His calves were blue and swollen, we had to stop to ice his legs down. I had to drop out of school. We were both borrowing money from everybody we knew to get it done. I had to do all the guitars by myself so I had something like three hundred guitar tracks to memorize. Our relationships suffered, we went broke, my school went to hell. Everything went to hell. Including that one line I guess. Mike came in and he had a day and a half to do all of the vocal tracks. A lot of the songs he hadn't even heard before when he had to sing them! We had to write the whole album without him because he was busy with school and he was traveling around, so he was gone. And Janis wasn't around! A lot of those songs, I had to show him right in the studio, so he had a lot of really unfamiliar work to do with the vocals. He had no time to practice a lot of those things. Under the circumstances, he did a fantastic job. It was a pretty tall order. I'd be in the studio saying, "Here are the lyrics, here's the melody, let's give it a shot." Hopefully that's the last time we'll ever have to record an album that way.

**What were the facilities this one was recorded in?**

We did half of it in Louder Studios in San Francisco. If you've heard of THE CHAMPS, that's Tim Green's studio. The reason we went there is I love THE CHAMPS' guitar sound. They're one of my favorite bands. We wanted that CHAMPS' guitar sound. We did Mike's vocal tracks there, and basic tracks like drums and stuff. For the bass guitar and the female vocals, Janis was able to fly in from Tokyo for four days and justaced all of that shit off of tablature.

**That's crazy.**

It was nuts! If it wasn't for PINK's money, we wouldn't have been able to finish it!

**Interesting.**

PINK saved our asses! Janis came in with a pocketful of PINK money. So she saved the recordings. We were out of money and out of friends at that point and still in debt to Tim Green over at Louder Studios. By then we were at Trakworx, which is the place where SLOUGH FEG records all their stuff. Janis came in, recorded all her stuff, pulled out her checkbook, and basically saved all of our asses! She came through in the end.

**Is there going to be a big sticker on the front of the album, 'Featuring members of PINK!'**?

I hope so! I thanked PINK in the liner notes. But there was one thing I omitted from the liner notes. I wanted to dedicate the last riff on the album to Rich Walker of SOLSTICE. That didn't make it in there.

But if you're reading this Rich, that last riff is dedicated to you!

**My second favorite song on the album was Insect! It makes a very nice one-two punch near the end of the album.**

Those were the only lyrics written after 9/11 on the record.

**I like how it builds up, and the image I get would be the vocals firing over each other.**

We have a nice 'split screen' vocal going on, where during the chorus you have the female vocals doing a really slow figure with the male vocals recapitulating the tongue twister lyrics of the intro. That song came out pretty good. And then at the end, we did a total freeform jam.

**That song points out that a lot of vocals in a lot of music are really boring. People don't want to do interesting things with vocals.**

One of the things I really have been listening to a lot around the time we were recording that record and writing a lot of that stuff, Chewy gave me these bootlegs of VAN HALEN demos from the very first album. Studio outtakes. Two CDs full of completely illegal demo recordings from the sessions of *Van Halen I*. I love VAN HALEN, the first three albums. Fuck Van Hagar! The first three VAN HALEN albums, you're listening to a hard rock band in top form. Me and Chewy both love VAN HALEN. Sorry!

**I've got that first album, so you're forgiven.**

Eddie Van Halen is such an incredible rhythm player. But the secret to early VAN HALEN is backup vocals. Go back to listen to *Van Halen*, *Van Halen II*, and *Women and Children First* and check out the backup vocals. VAN HALEN's backup vocals are amazing. And the rhythm guitar. Fuck the lead guitar. Eddie Van Halen is a great e lead guitarist, but his rhythm playing is phenomenal! When I try to learn VAN HALEN songs, I don't give a shit about learning the lead. It's the rhythm parts that throw me! I'm a rhythm guitarist more than a lead guitarist. One of my favorite guitar players is Malcolm Young of AC/DC. You know, the guy who just stands there and just whacks out the riffs for the whole song? He's great! The guy's a machine! But yeah, interesting vocal patterns, having the lead vocals doing one thing and having other vocals doing other things behind it, nobody does that shit anymore! When you listen to the masters of music, there's a lot of forgotten, arcane things about music that people don't really do anymore. Arranging, dynamics. I think BLIND GUARDIAN does it more than anybody else as far as what I've heard recently. Those guys just get a little too cheesy for me. I'm really not one to call anything cheesy, because I guess you can call HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE, well not really cheesy, but we have been called hokey before.

**What I love about BLIND GUARDIAN is that they're a major label band, able to live off the music, and they're continually pushing their**

**music. Every album is just more layered than the last one. They're not taking their success and saying "Here's another album like the last one."**

I have a love-hate relationship with Luca Turilli. It's total Disney but it's good music to build shelves to.

**The RHAPSODY guys have a problem with lyrics, mostly. Did you hear that Christopher Lee is going singing on their new album?**

Really?

**They're getting rid of the lispy guy and Lee is going to do narration, and then he's going to be singing opera style on some big**

**Apparently he's got real opera training.**

Luca really wants to get into the soundtrack business. I think they should have him do the music for the Lion King. He'd be perfect!

**As long as he didn't do the lyrics.**

Phil Collins is getting those jobs. Luca's up against some pretty heavy competition there.

**I wonder if this is going to make RHAPSODY more popular or if people are just going to say, "Christopher, what are you doing?"**

Maybe they should just get Phil Collins on there.

**He's proven that he can do good stuff when he wants to. He just hasn't wanted to in quite awhile.**

I'm of the belief that Phil Collins should never have gotten out from behind his fucking drum set. Unfortunately he did.

**I like some of his 80s pop stuff.**

But yeah, Christopher Lee, that's crazy. I don't know, man. You listen to it, and it's so layered, you wonder, "Am I even listening to metal anymore?"

The guitars kind of get lost. It doesn't sound like rock and roll. It doesn't sound like metal anymore. It makes me want to put on side one of that METAL CHURCH album. Duuh-nuuu!

**At the same time, maybe it's like what you were saying, not concentrating on metal and concentrating on making good songs. It's interesting you'd question how metal someone is.**

Well when you're talking about RHAPSODY, they call themselves Hollywood Metal. That's their words, not mine. If you're going to bill yourself as metal, and as this specific kind of metal, there's just so many layers of vocals and stuff, I just like it a little grittier. The HAMMERS stuff, as epic and as power metal as you might want to say it is, it's still got a gritty feel to it. I don't know if you agree with that...

**Oh I definitely agree...**

We aren't slick players. We all grew up playing punk rock. As far as I'm concerned, HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE is punk rock. It goes along with the ideals of being non-conformist, doing it yourself, doing what you want and breaking the rules, and telling everybody to fuck off, man. It's that punk ideal. The music sounds metal, but the ideal is not that we're here to conform or to be slick.

**That makes sense, but if someone hands you fifty thousand dollars to go do a record, I have a feeling wouldn't be the same as on a six thousand dollar budget.**

If somebody handed me fifty thousand dollars, I'd probably spend five thousand dollars on the record. I suppose if you wanted to hire a symphony orchestra, that would cost several grand. Do you think RHAPSODY actually gets fifty thousand dollars to make an album?

**They're using real orchestras and hiring famous movie stars now... although they're still using those fake fucking drums.**

That's another thing, the drums always sound really fake on those records. You've just got these drums going \*makes power metal drum sounds\* and the guitars are just fast picking over that. I suppose there's a bass guitar somewhere in there, you can never hear it, and then just layers and layers of crap. All icing and no cake. A lot of the melodies are really predictable, but a lot of the melodies are really good. But there's no real emotion in that shit. I don't feel it.

**I wonder if the Italian approach to power metal is like the Italian approach to horror movies. You get these awesome, really good special effects and then really crappy scripts so you can't get involved with any of the characters.**

I don't know. I think a lot of it comes down to lyrical content. What are they trying to say? Are they trying to say anything, really? Or are they trying to tell a half-baked tale of a king and a dragon? Does that tale they're trying to tell mean anything to them? Is there any real passion in the message? I'm sure they're passionate about the music they're playing, but it's like playing miniature golf or something. If you get really good at it, cool. But I don't understand the motivation. Perhaps they're just trying to make a living. They're extremely good at what they're doing, but I just don't get it.

**Rhapsody was going to do what they call a black metal side project.**

Oh god.

**On the last album, there was a song that was a lot more thrashy, the vocals did get rougher, and I think they just saw the black metal bands like CRADLE OF FILTH and DIMMU BORGIR were using lots of keyboards and orchestration and thought they'd go for that. Somebody must have smartened them up because you don't hear about plans for that anymore.**

Like black metal needs another black metal album for weddings. I like black metal. I like the really necro, lo-fi, fucking EIKENSKADEN, and all the old DARK THRONE stuff, the first DØDHEIMSGARD album, just the deep, dark, poorly produced, you know what I'm talking about.

**If you can read the logo, it sucks.**

Evil, necro fucking black metal. That's the only metal that I've been listening to lately. Shit like

GRAVELAND. It's really unfortunately that the guy is a fucking nazi, but I like the music! It's cool! **I find it hard to believe that there are legitimately that many people that have such beliefs in both the Nazi philosophy and extreme black metal to have dozens of bands springing up all over the world.**

It doesn't surprise me a whole lot. People want to shock their parents. And you can make money! There's this core of Nazis out there who are going to buy anything Nazi. If you have a PENTAGRAM bootleg, you know you're going to sell five thousand copies just because it's PENTAGRAM. I need to say I'm not drawing any parallels between Pentagram, which is one of my favorite bands in the world, to anything Nazi at all. But there's a core of people that are into that. They'll buy anything. But you could form a Nazi black metal band and make money. Not that I'd recommend doing that, but that might be a reason people do it. "As long as I call myself Lord Balderdash and wear a cape, nobody will know who I am and I can probably sell ten thousand records and hide behind my PO Box." Have totally unintelligible lyrics, slap it all together in a week, and if you act all cryptofascistnecronord, even skinheads will buy that stuff. Maybe we shouldn't be talking about anything Nazi related because of the lightning bolts on the album cover. But yeah, RHAPSODY, Nazis, I don't understand any of this stuff. The whole point that I was getting at, what's their motivation? There's a lack of passion in that. Do you hear that?

**I don't know. They're so inarticulate expressing things in English. It's hard to tell whether we're missing something, or if there's nothing there.**

The way that the lyrics are sung are really earnest.

**And their first five albums were one epic story. I think they believed they were doing this grand thing, with a lot of meaning and passion, but it just comes off... I don't know.**

Speaking as someone who did write a concept album about dragons and talking axes, that album was basically an environmental revenge fantasy. It was about nature taking revenge on the human race. What would happen if trees get mad? That's something that's very pertinent in today's world. We are destroying the environment, moreso today than ever. If it continues, we're all going to die of asphyxiation. Trees manufacture oxygen, in case people forget that. All of the oxygen we breathe comes from trees, so if we cut all the trees down, there isn't any air. This is really kindergarten stuff, but it's true! That's why I wrote that record. It wasn't some stupid D&D thing for me. I was pissed off watching the destruction of the environment and I wrote an album about it. It's a bedtime story for ecoterrorists.

**It came out a lot more coherent and interesting than when EXIT-13 did environmental lyrics.**

That's part of the reason for the dragons and axes. You want to make a point, but you also don't want

to beat people over the head with it. It's got to be at least somewhat enjoyable and kind of timeless. You don't want to date your material so much. On *The August Engine*, there's mention of a screen. Screens are modern technology. There are no axes in *The August Engine*. Definitely no dragons.

**But you go into A Room and a Riddle and there's candles and robes and cloaks that certainly don't give a modern image.**

It's supposed to be timeless and calling up images that everyone can relate to. It's not medieval, it's not modern, it's kind of archetypical. Just trying to be evocative and poetic with things without talking about getting online this morning.

**There are albums that do that. You haven't heard horrible until you've heard an introduction that's a kind tapping on his keyboard, breaking into websites before the first song.**

That's horrible. I'm glad I've never heard that. I wouldn't want to hear that! Lyrics are a big important thing to me. It took me so much longer to write the lyrics than to write the music. They have to be right. You want to evoke the right image without getting too specific about anything so the listener can draw their own conclusions about what is going on. This is the first interview I've done for this album, so I'm really reluctant to talk about the songs!

**Oh boy.**

I don't know. I'm not really sure if I want to tell people what those songs are about. You can get an idea in your own head about what it's about. Your ideas are as good as mine. Maybe even better.

**Doesn't make it the right idea though.**

Sure it does. It's right for you. A conclusion that you can come to on your own makes the songs yours in a little nice way. I had pretty specific things I was writing about, but I don't know if I want to say what they were.

**Not ready to analyze the lyrics quite yet, but my third favorite song is A Room and a Riddle. It has a more straightforward metal sound. To use an expression, it's a rocking song.**

Very fun metal song to write.

**It's pretty much only the straightforward metal song on the album.**

I would agree that's the most metal song on the album by far. It's the toothiest and riffiest song on the album, although we don't repeat any riffs in that song too much. The first verse and the second verse are completely different. There's an illustrative passage in the second verse where the female vocals come in and the birds fly away. Shit like that. And then there's that whole thing at the end. In fact, when you listen to the second to last riff, where he's singing about sentries and doors, that theme is actually repeated in *Doomed Parade*. The last chord progression in *Room and a Riddle* is used again in *Doomed Parade*. I was looking at it like, this is really goofy, the album is kind of a program and

each riff is a function you can use anywhere in the program.

**You mentioned that you're not the most technical of bands, but you do go into instrumental exercises.**

Yeah, sloppy as fuck, but I think it came out alright. **If there's a performance you'd consider sloppy as fuck, why so many instrumental diversions on the album?**

I assume you're talking about The August Engine Part Two here where we have that ten minute long freedom jam! I just wanted to do a really long, crazy, instrumental exercise in musical joy. Just music, just because. Just for fun. Because it was really cool. It's doing a lot of stuff that I like to do, breaking it down, building it back up, having a great guitar harmony, the big ending. But it's also a descriptive passage describing the lyrics that happened right before that part, where the female voice comes in and says "Enter the light so it blinds you," and then goes off into this wild musical adventure. It's illustrating the vastness of the *August Engine* as a concept. You could say that this spirit is standing next to you and she waives her hand and this huge vista appears before your eyes.

**You can actually hear the bass on this album which makes it different than most metal albums.**

A good bass line can really make a song. A good example is Life Eternal by MAYHEM.

**Too many people are of the opinion that all a bassist should be doing is following the drums.**

The bassist should follow the drums. The bassist should always be paying attention to the kick drums and locking in with the drummer. A good bass player can do that and also throw in passages that work well with what the rest the melodies are doing. In the second verse of Doomed Parade, the bass does this whole different line, which adds extra tension to the second verse. The bass is a great instrument to use, it can be used to great effect. Geezer Butler, man!

**What I consider great bass performances are those where the instrument is taking its own space and not playing second to another instrument.**

A great bass player like Geezer Butler, John Paul Jones, they know how to weave the bass in around the around and through the guitars to where it really adds a lot to the music. It's not showboating, it's just good music in action. A little bit of hitting the fifth here, the third there, under a certain chord and really thickening it up and making it sound nice. Bass playing is a whole craft unto itself, it's another one of those lost arts. Not many people pay attention to bass playing either. The best way to use bass is to compose a really killer bass line, but if it sticks out, you're not doing your job. It should really blend in with everything, but it should add extra texture as well as doing its job with being the rhythm section. Like Chris Squire from YES, he does a really good job with that. Phil Lynott of THIN LIZZY. Their

bass playing doesn't grab you by the throat but if you listen to it you realize it really does add a lot to the song. But a bass solo? There are two of them [in *The August Engine*]. One is in the Overture, August Engine Part One, where there's these chords going on, and the bass chimes in with a melody. There's another one in August Engine Part Two, where we're in the middle of our freedom jam and the acoustic guitar is doing its little figure, and the bass kind of comes in, \*makes bass noise\*. I thought that was cool!

**You're not going to get any complaints from me on that!**

I said, "Janis, make me a bass flower." And she's like, "A bass flower? I can make a bass flower!" So she made a bass flower! A little pretty bass part to go along with the acoustic guitar. The acoustic guitar was a rhythm acoustic guitar part. There's not much going on there, there's a little bit of jazzy bass drumming, and the bass does a little melody there, and then it goes into the next thing.

**How did you decide on the tracklisting? How come A Room and a Riddle isn't further up in the tracklisting, since it's the most in-your-face song.**

The lyrics are describing a descent into madness, and the songs are in order of the lyrical content. Sort of. To put it really simply. Do you notice the lyrics get more weird and fucked up as the album goes along? The song sequence was one of the big problems when we had to take songs off. We could have taken the one THIN LIZZY sort of ballad and put it somewhere else on the record, but that wouldn't have made any sense at all as far as the lyrical integrity of the record. Most people would say, "Who cares?" but I'd rather just take it off than have it out of context. If you notice at the end of that song, he's following the candle, and in A Room and a Riddle, where he's finding himself in this room...  
**... following the candle.**

Taking that song off compromises the lyrical integrity of the record. It sounds a little bit weird to me because we were following along with a story a little bit. It had to go. It just wasn't working. But the order of the songs are totally determined by the lyrics.

**With the candle branching between songs, it was making me think this was another full blown concept album and I can't figure out the story.**

Now that we took a bunch of songs off, it doesn't make very much sense at all as a story. It's just a series of snapshots along the way. Just smoke a bunch of pot and think about it. I'm sure you'll come up with something.

**When did you decide what this album was going to be lyrically?**

Originally I had a specific idea. Then I had another specific idea, then I had another specific idea, then it mutated and turned into this crazy thing. It sort of determined itself. I started out with a very specific idea for a story, and that didn't last long at all. It

became an abstract picture of shit in my head. There's some stuff on there about what you go through growing up and stuff. Again, I'm pretty reluctant to put too fine a point on it. The album is about going crazy. One way to describe the record is a conversation between a microcosm and a macrocosm. The song Rainfall is pretty obvious. It's about how people are born like drops of rain falling to Earth, and some of them wind up dying in the gutter, some wind up living really straight, boring lives, and some of them wind up really lost. Just like raindrops, where do they go? And the album follows one of the raindrops. In the lyrics, you have different voices. The individual will speak, and then the macrocosm will speak from the sky down to the shivering little person and say really mean things.

**When you wrote the lyrics, did you know who was going to sing what at that point?**

When I'm writing lyrics, I'm definitely hearing Mike's voice, or Jamie's voice, and when that gets done, I'll re-write the lyrics several times. It usually takes three pages of lyrics, and I cull that down into a final result. It's a pain in the ass. The lyrics to The Trial and the Grave took six months. I mulled over those lyrics, I have half a diary full of just those lyrics. I'm just glad it's done and it's finally coming out. I definitely have the specific voices in mind when I write the lyrics, but sometimes it doesn't work out. I had a song that didn't sound right when Mike sang it in the studio, so I had Kris Force sing it, and it still didn't sound right, so that song got dropped. It just wasn't working. Then there was the parts where I had Mike singing or Janis singing, and I'd say, "Well here we should have both of them singing this part together." Just to express the line better. It really sucks, but I can't really sing. You write a bunch of lyrics that you think are great, and when you show them to the singer and they sing the lyrics, it sounds like shit. Mike will be looking at me like, "You want me to sing this?" "Sorry dude. I'll rewrite it."

**What normally causes that?**

A lot of times the tempo of the song will prove humanly impossible to fit all the syllables in. Or the meter of the line will be too stiff. Or Mike just doesn't feel comfortable singing it, he just doesn't like it. He's not going to put in a good performance if he doesn't like it. There are points in the studio where I had to go in and rewrite the lyrics on the spot so they were singable, or take a line out completely. Sometimes you find out at the last second that it's not going to work that way. It sounded good in my head, but once it's on tape... We didn't have the chance to test a lot of these songs live. *The Bastard*, we played all that material in front of audiences live before we recorded it. Most of it, anyway. But with *August Engine*, we didn't have a live lineup, so we didn't have the chance to get those songs out in front of a crowd and see how they did. A lot of time you can tell by the crowd reaction whether a song is working.

**I have to ask about Room and a Riddle, it's so specific in setting and everything, but I know you mean something else with it.**

It's a metaphor.

**At the end it totally turns, "Behind each door: A withered child clutching a knife." What the fuck, man? This is going so over my head, I need help.**

That song? Hmm. Do you remember what it was like when you first fell in love with music? Did you really know what you were in for?

**Oh hell no.**

All the assholes you would have to deal with along the way. That's the best that I can put that. Does that make any sense.

**The end still seems...**

You follow the candle in, and then you find yourself in a room full of fucking assholes, and they're all hiding behind their fucking image. And you find out at the end they're a bunch of insecure mother fuckers. They're ready to stab you in the back. There you go, there's a concrete explanation for those lyrics.

**The only other one I need an in-depth explanation for then would be Doomed Parade. That's too much of a masterpiece for me to not know.**

That song has two different points of view in it. There's the point of view of the male vocals, and there's that little interlude in the middle during the quiet part. How do I explain that song? The scenario is you're sitting in your room, freezing cold and completely depressed because you have lost something. You can't even remember what it was like to have that thing. But you used to have it. You're lamenting that, and then somewhere off in some bizarre place that you don't even have access to, a little piece of it is trying to reach out to you and give you a little bit of help, but you can't hear that. It's kind of a spiritual thing a little bit. But not Christian!

**Most of the song is 'Oh woe is me' victim stuff, but the middle part seems to be 'You got what you deserved, fucker.'**

There's the 'Here is a wound, to go with your uniform' part, yeah, exactly. Nobody put a gun to your head, this is the life you chose. You're going to have to deal with that. Then there's the whole 'Sleep angel sleep' part which is this other voice.

**You don't lose those lyrics in the song just when listening to those parts. You have to concentrate on what's being said.**

That's the secret of great lyrics. When I'm listening to a great song with great lyrics, you want to hear what they're saying. You'll tell people, "Shut up, I'm trying to listen." What are they trying to say? I have to listen to the words, it just makes the song so much more important. You just get drawn in. That means that song worked, at least in your case. The song is about something. It's not just a bunch of crap about how I'm going to dice your trachea with a ball and chain or whatever. Even if you don't

understand what it's about, hopefully a part of you resonates to it on some level. At least that's what I'm hoping. But that line, 'Here is a wound', ties back into A Room and a Riddle. "An oath to be sworn and a robe to be worn now you're one of us!"

**And then the calm "Sleep angel sleep" part that explodes with "Into the night..."**

That's the part of that song I really don't like. The "Into the night..." is a bit too much. It should have been sung a little more gently. It's a little too much of a crotch grabbing metal moment there.

**I thought it had that snap that the 'to hell' part didn't have.**

Janis was having a good day. She's definitely a kung fu master in the studio, aces her tracks. She's a pro. That's why she gets these big jobs. Mike had much more difficult circumstances, a lot more to do and a lot less time to figure it all out. He really takes the lead on this record. There's a lot more male vocals than female vocals on this record.

**When you're saying 'Into the night...' should have been more gentle...**

It should have been more gentle. The way that Jamie sings it now is perfect.

**How does that segue into the more active instrumental part when you'd just taken everything down?**

That whole part, 'Sleep angel sleep', is from somewhere trying to assure the sentient center of the song. Sort of like your guardian angel. It's OK, just go to sleep. The 'Into the night' thing, that sort of happened. I didn't envision it being this big thing. It just kind of happened. Janis decided she wanted to go for the crotch on that one. Everybody in the studio, we all laughed when she sang that line. Then we thought, "Hey, that's pretty cool!" In the end, it could have been a little more gentle.

**And even taking literal imagery, the doomed parade is brilliant.**

That's life. Look out your window.

**Everything that every doom metal band has ever sung about... on floats!**

And Doomed Parade also refers to the parade of memories going through the character's mind. "Like a ghostly brigade."

**So if the whole album is about somebody going insane...**

Sort of, yeah. It's also a dichotomy between a microcosm and a macrocosm. I suppose you could say an individual and the society in which he or she lives. It's pretty clearly explained in August Engine Part Two, the last song on side one.

**Is that how you look at this? Side one, side two?**

For the vinyl, yes. The CD's not out yet [at the time of the conversation...- ed]. I guess it's the fourth track on the final version. But I prefer to think of the vinyl. I'm a vinyl junkie.

**What is it about that vinyl?**

It's bigger. You can fit more stuff on the cover. There's something much more tactilely satisfying about taking the shrink wrap off an album, then

pulling out a printed inner sleeve. Hell yeah! But for the CD version, it's track four. The one with the freedom jam!

**How spontaneous could that have been when you were missing members in the writing?**

There was some spontaneity, and then there was some scripted stuff. Chewy and I just went down to the space and spent a couple of days jamming. We had stuff happening, riffs happening, and then those parts would be in A for awhile, or B for awhile. A lot of it was scripted. I'd say most of it was pretty planned out. There was some spontaneity, but it would be impossible for somebody to do that off the top of their head.

**Since it's been so long since it was recorded, and you finally have a finished copy in your hand, what's your opinion on the album?**

I didn't listen to it for a long time. I didn't like it. It was such a nightmare to make that fucking album. And then after we finally finished it, nobody wanted to put it out. It became a pretty depressing thing for me. I didn't have a very high opinion of it. I listened to it again the other night, and I thought, "Hey, this is pretty good!" I was of the opinion it was a deeply flawed record, but listening to it in hindsight, it's pretty good. But I just have some bad memories making it. Those were hard times. It's interesting to me, maybe it's just because I was there, but I think you can hear the desperation in a lot of the tracks.

**That's a good thing if it's supposed to be a downbeat record.**

It's loose and live sounding. You can tell we didn't do the Pro Tools to it. There's mistakes and shit all over it. We were hanging on by our fingernails through the whole session. You can hear that desperation. It sounds like we are going nuts. We were!

**Looking back a few years, what do you think of *The Bastard*?**

Oh geez, I don't know, I think it was pretty cool. I think it's good for what it is. I think it's really good! It's weird to me because I was using a lot of blast beats and harsh black metal vocals that I would never use now for HAMMERS. I have LUDICRA for that now. I won't say LUDICRA is a black metal band now, because I might get in trouble, I guess there's a lot of rules if you're a black metal band or not. At the time I wrote *The Bastard*, I didn't have an outlet for that. I think it worked. I would never do that now.

**How do you manage, within the confines of HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE, to take away an element like that and not make it sound like the band lost something?**

Frankly, I really don't care. I would never even worry about that. It's my party. It's our band, we don't have to do blast beats if we don't want to. Who knows. There could be a HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE fifth album someday that will come out and be all blast beats. That could easily happen. There could also be a HAMMERS OF

MISFORTUNE album that comes out that has no electronic instruments at all. There's a lot of shit I want to do. We've been toying with the idea of doing a totally generic German thrash album. Just write twelve really brutal DESTRUCTION, KREATOR, BATHORY type shit.

**With hammonds.**

Being HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE, it'll probably end up coming out really fucking different. It'll be cool. I want to do all that stuff! I hope no one expects us to repeat ourselves. We're just not going to do that. Collectively we have two songs written for the next album with this lineup. They sound great, but I don't think they sound like anything on *The August Engine*. A lot more metal.

**How many albums did you sign to Cruz Del Sur for?**

We got this one and one more. We're going to deliver another album to them as soon as we can finish writing it and recording it, and then we're free to roam I guess.

**Back to the grind again.**

If we do well with Cruz Del Sur, maybe we'll sign to them again. We have our third album to work on, and we've been doing so many gigs that we haven't had the time to work on new material. The next album to me looks really far away. I'd like to tell you we're going into the studio early this coming year, but... It would be nice, but I want to have sixteen songs. We've got sketches for about twelve songs. At the rate that I write, a sketch is a melody, a chord progression, and a few lines of lyrics. That's a sketch. It took us six months to write Doomed Parade in the practice space. We worked on that song for a long time. The problem is, and I know this is totally boring bullshit, but we have all these gigs we have to play. We rehearsed the set so we won't suck live, and after we're done playing through the set twice, we get to work on new songs. By the time we've done that, everybody's got somewhere to be in a half hour, so we don't get a chance to work on new material a whole lot, until we tell everyone that we are not playing any live gigs. For two months, we're just going to get down and write, and then we start getting stuff done. A lot of people in bands reading this will know exactly what I'm talking about. When you have gigs, you just have to rehearse what you're going to play live. The new songs take a back seat when you're active live.

**How different is the writing process now? Is it still mostly you?**

I'm really hoping for more input. In other words, I wouldn't mind a little help. So far, Sigrid and Jamie have been really good to work with, but we're just learning how to work together. What we really need to do, is write five or six songs really quick in succession without worrying about the arrangements or being fresh or original or anything. Just so we can learn how to write together. We might get a couple of keepers out of that, but at least we will have

gotten used to this whole songwriting thing. So far we've just gotten our act together to go on tour. It was a lot of work. Those songs are not that easy to learn. The writing process for us is just starting with the new lineup. What's interesting is writing for keyboards. I've never done that before. Learning how to use the B3 to best effect, how to weave it in with the guitars, when to leave it up front. It's a big learning experience.

**What five albums are you listening to lately?**

I'm listening to SCORPIONS' *Taken By Force*, *In Trance*, and *Virgin Killer*. I love those albums. Uli Roth, man is so good. Are you into that era of SCORPIONS at all? That is the shit, dude. For some reason lately I've just been going back to the SCORPIONS. QUEEN II is on my turntable this morning. That's a real desert island for me.

**I can just imagine what people thought of Brian May the first time they heard him. There's just so much personality in his guitar playing that's just missing today.**

And the dynamics. QUEEN II is what really inspired me to get a keyboard player. Not any of those bullshit keyboards nowadays. And I have to add DEEP PURPLE *In Rock* to that. Just listen to what those guys did with a B3 and a guitar, what QUEEN was able to do with a piano and guitars, that's what inspired me to get the keyboards going.

**I listen to In Rock way too much.**

That album just fucking smokes. And then I got into URIAH HEEP from there. *Demons and Wizards*. I've definitely been listening to the EAGLES and STEELY DAN lately. Talk about good lyrics, STEELY DAN, good lyrics. Their songs are so funny, and so sleazy, and the music is like this smooth wifeswapping jazz. So fucking smarmy. It just calls to mind a gold coke spoon nestled in a generous amount of chest hair, an open collared shirt, smoking what they used to call an Acapulco Gold. These guys were just too smart. I could say TUBEWAY ARMY, that was Gary Newman's first band when he actually played guitar. Gary Newman is one of my favorite guitar players.

**Listening to anything recent?**

Most of the good metal I've been seeing lately is coming from the crusty punk circuit. Spiky jackets, tattoos on the face, that kind of thing. Bands like GARUDA from Ft. Worth, ASUNDER from Oakland. You've got to check out ASUNDER. Really really good doom. It's got John Gossard from WEAKLING. They're great. Recently, shit, I haven't had any money to buy records. I listened to a fairly recent RHAPSODY record. New GRAVELAND, I like the new EIKENSKADEN. A band called LEVIATHAN, the two CD thing that just came out on Tumult. APOCALYPTICA fucking rule. Fuck the METALLICA covers. The METALLICA covers that they did, forget about those. *Cult*, and the new one that just came out that actually has drums on it [*Reflections*]. Also,

AGALLOCH, those guys are great. I like those guys a lot.

**That Mantle album...**

LUDICRA played with those guys, and they were fucking great. We were all into them way before we had a chance to play with them. It was kind of an honor to play with those guys. And if you've heard bands like TEEN CTHULU and FALL OF THE BASTARDS, from Portland. A band called SWARMING HORDES, from Seattle. These all look like indie kids, like crusty punks, but they're putting out music that kicks ass over anything that's coming out of Europe. It's weird, but what they're doing is slaying anything coming out of the traditional metal scene in Europe. That's where the next thing is. It's going to come out of the US, and from kids who aren't traditionally metal. They were playing hardcore, and then they heard AT THE GATES. These are the shows we're playing. We play with AMBER ASYLUM and ASUNDER and FALL OF THE BASTARD. Those are our peers. If we were just depending on metal people, our shows would be empty. And then there's the whole stoner rock thing. We play with HIGH ON FIRE. And then we play with THE CHAMPS. There's a lot of good music out there. As far as metal goes, metal is in a very sorry state. We had this conversation last time.

**I'm just finding a lot of metal I'm liking these days is taking from the 70s in spirit a lot.**

I listen to the two good YES albums, *Fragile* and *The Yes Album*. I like that shit a lot, GENESIS *Nursery Cryme*. Phil Collins should have stayed behind the drums. That's another album that made me want to get an organ. More weird rare shit like NIGHTSUN from Germany, SIR LORD BALTIMORE.

**Have you heard of SLEEPYTIME GORILLA MUSEUM?**

Oh yeah dude. Oh man. If you ever get a chance to see them live, don't miss it. Their record is great, but they're devastating live. SLEEPYTIME GORILLA MUSEUM is another one you can add to my list. We'd actually planned to do a gig with them, but I guess they had some trouble with their lineup so the show was postponed. I would love to tour with them. But they overwhelmed me. I could not believe what I was hearing. I had to leave the show! I work at a night club. I make my living at rock shows. I see twenty bands a week. These guys, the show that they put on, I've never seen anything like it. The polyrhythms they were creating were too much. I could not get my mind around it. It was incredible! There's another band called DRUNK HORSE that's pretty good. They're another CHAMPS alumni, totally doing THE CHAMPS, ZZ TOP style. That's not what I'd consider metal though. That's the artsy hard rock thing. Live they're fantastic. Of course THE FUCKING CHAMPS is one of my favorites.

**What final words do you have for the reading public?**

I have to pee.

**Discography**

With HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE:

*The Bastard* (2001 Tumult)

*The August Engine* (2003 Cruz Del Sur)

With THE LORD WEIRD SLOUGH FEG:

*Down Among the Deadmen* (2000 Dragonheart)

*Traveller* (2003 Dragonheart)

With LUDICRA:

*Hollow Psalms* (2002 Life Is Abuse)

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Feature Interview

## in the woods...

*Is it lame to say that I'd been meaning to interview this band for years after LotFP started up, but never got around to it before they broke up? That in the fifth anniversary issue you're getting a defunct band being featured that had been thoroughly listened to and enjoyed throughout the LotFP years, but hardly ever, if at all, mentioned in print? Yeah, maybe it would be a tad lame, but luckily the band just came out with a live album recorded the night of their last show ever, after they had announced the break-up. It's the perfect excuse for me to talk to the band, and you better believe I jumped on it. Explaining why IN THE WOODS... is so fantastic is a little bit difficult. Coming from pagany blacky metaly roots on their early material and moving closer to some psychedelic hiking trip by the end, the band is obviously free-thinking when it comes to its music, and answered to no-one in its journey. For my personal tastes, I think their middle material is their best, because that's when the strong influences that bookended their career were the most mutated and indistinct. The live album is great because it travels throughout the band's history, with a mutating lineup right there on stage as they do it. Simply a great band whose feel is similar to that of early ULVER and OPETH, but unlike those two, as the band moved into different sounds, they retained the same atmospheres. Excellent. So in a bad segue, here is singer Jan Transit to tell us more...*

**It must be weird doing an interview for a band that's been broken up for three years.**

It is, believe me.

**Why did it take three years for the live album to be released?**

We were supposed to have it out in like half a year. It was recorded during Christmas, we thought of having it out the next autumn. We had a twenty-four track recorder at the venue when we played, so we needed to mix the whole thing. This was to be done by one of the guys in the band, and he was really occupied with other kind of things. We just had to take it as it came. He mixed when he had the spare time for it. I don't think the mix was ready for one and a half years. When the mix was done, we had to do the mastering, it took some time to do the cover art, that's probably why it took a little time.

**Looking back after a number of years, what do you think is the musical legacy of IN THE WOODS...?**

That's a question somebody else should answer. Just from what I've heard from other people, we represented something unique. Maybe our blend of just mixing all different styles that we've been into through the years, just mixing up everything as long as it sounds cool. We were never concerned with genres, or anything like that. I think we managed to do some interesting stuff that a lot of fans can find inspiration in. We were very liberal with the way we did music, that was one of the more important things we left behind.

**I know in the US none of the albums were properly released here so you're a really obscure, underground band. Were things any better as far as popularity goes in Europe?**

Not really. As far as I know, I think we sold less albums for each album that was released. <laughs> That was pretty funny. When we did the first album, we were like eighteen or something. About nineteen when we released it. We didn't know what to do, it was a debut album, we didn't have too much experience in studio recordings. We thought that with each album we released that we had gotten better, we'd improved, more interesting as a band. The majority of the listeners had an idea that everything was the other way around. Just got more strange, obscure, whatever. It seems that a few guys stayed with us through all of the albums, followed us, in a way. Our evolution became their evolution, whatever. We sold a few albums in Europe, but we were in the extreme underground, basically. We never really had humongous sales, but pretty good for an underground band with lousy distribution.

**Do you think if you'd had a bigger label that you would have been more popular or do you think that with the nature of your music that you were going to be obscure no matter what?**

I don't think we would have sold a lot more albums if we were on a bigger label. We had some interest from some really huge independent European companies. We thought that maybe we would sell a few more thousand copies, but we really feared losing our artistic integrity. So we decided to keep everything small, and the music was too obscure anyway so we could never make a living out of this, so fuck it, we decided to stay on a smaller label and do what we wanted to do.

**Early on in your career, all of the press I did see about you guys described you as a kind of black metal. How connected were you with the black metal scene of the early 90s, really?**

Basically, nothing. When we did our first recordings, there were a lot of things happening in Norway, there was a lot of press related to this all over the world. I

think we just automatically got linked to this kind of scene because we were from Norway and we played this extreme kind of music to some extent. I always said in interviews, if you think we're black metal, whatever, I don't care what you think we are or what you think we sound like. But it didn't have anything to do with religion or anything like that. We just did what we liked, and we didn't care about labeling. I thought it was pretty weird that even well-known journalists labeled us black metal, even on the second album when we didn't have any screaming vocals or anything. Most of the time we just made jokes about it, saying that we're really evil now and going into the dark rehearsal room.

**Did you ever manage to pick up a more 'progressive' crowd outside of a metal audience?**

When we did the second album, we sent out some promos to more progressive magazines. We got pretty good reviews in some well-known progressive press, but basically we had a hard time with the distribution and it was not easy to find the albums. I don't think we picked up a big progressive crowd throughout the years, but maybe something happened with the fourth album, with all the seven inches on it, we got put on a lot of progressive compilations. We lost the audience we had at the beginning and other people picked it up.

**In trying to do research for this interview, it was very difficult with the changing of the names in the lineup, it's hard to find reliable information on the band. Just from the way the credits on the albums were, you were doing it on purpose.**

Yes, definitely.

**In this music, as you said, you're not going to be making a living on it, there's hardly any money in it, so one of the only benefits would be whatever fame you're going to get. You didn't even seem to want that.**

I don't think we did. Even in the very beginning, we had this idea that we're doing music, not show business. We didn't care about spending a lot of time on image or photo sessions or things like that. Fuck the glamour! We focused all the way to make good songs, make good lyrics, and that was basically the major thing about it. I remember when we were doing the interviews for the first album, there were a lot of journalists moaning about being sent photos of Norwegian photos and shit. "We make magazines about people, not about woods! If you're not going to send us any proper pictures, then we're not going to do an interview!" In the majority of these occasions, we ended up doing an interview anyway. We didn't feel like doing a lot of compromising. We thought we should just do the music, and let other people take care of the rest.

**You seemed to change your mind about the pictures by the time *Strange in Stereo* came out, going in the opposite direction because some of that stuff is pretty outrageous there.**

We used to rehearse in this little storeroom. We were in the basement, and on the ground floor there was this little costume shop. We wanted to do some pictures and stuff. We didn't plan to do any special things, but we invited this friend of ours with a camera to the rehearsal place, talked about what we were going to do, and hey, there were all these costumes lying around. Let's try something on and see how it works! We did a few hours for a photo session with funny stuff like Donald Duck

masks, all these funny costumes lying around. We had a good time about it. One way or the other, we just wanted to give a message to all the people who had been moaning about the image kind of thing. Some people liked it, some people got the humor in it, and some of the hardcore fans sent the letters and emails saying, "What the fuck are you up to now?" We had a good time doing it, basically.

**I have a feeling most of the people reading this won't have heard your music. In your words, how would you describe the musical evolution of IN THE WOODS...?**

When we started the band, we had no common musical preferences except for the Swedish band BATHORY. Besides that, we were listening to totally different stuff. Maybe we started out with some pretty extreme, melodious metal where the melodies were in the guitar. The vocals ended up being extreme on top. We went to more melodious stuff, doing a little bit of riffing and stuff but with melodious vocals on top. Getting more and more progressive, maybe even symphonic at times. More or less, we ended up in a psychedelic, colorful hybrid between rock, metal, psychedelia and some progressive stuff. The more we played together, the more we figured out that the legacy from the late 60s, early 70s, we were really addicted to that period of music. We got more and more into these obscure bands from this era. That's the story, going from very extreme stuff to more experimental, melodious stuff.

**What examples would you give of obscure bands from the late 60s, early 70s?**

We did some cover versions over the years, old PINK FLOYD stuff, JEFFERSON AIRPLANE, and we did this KING CRIMSON cover. But from this period there was a lot of interesting stuff going around, like Bob Dylan...

**... who is the fucking king, right?**

Right! <laughs> Definitely. We went to really obscure vinyl stores that had strange stuff from the period and we just picked up on different bands, some really known and some really unknown. LED ZEPPELIN was also very commonly enjoyed by the whole band. Different stuff from that period.

**As far as your early work, when that first album came out, for what was going on in that time period, that was a really wild album. When you're to the point of being on a label and having your first record released, what sort of reaction were you expecting?**

With that image kind of thing, we didn't care about people's reactions. We were really amazed. We thought if we sold four or five thousand of this album, we'd be really happy. Just after a few months, I think we sold ten thousand copies, then it became fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, and we thought, "What the fuck is going on here?" People seem to like this stuff! We picked up listeners from the black metal genre, the death metal genre, even forty, fifty year old guys from the psychedelic scene in the 60s, they really enjoyed the album! We thought, "What?" We didn't want our parents to enjoy this! We were amazed with the reactions that the debut album got. Six months before we went to the studio to record the album, I told the guys I didn't want to do the shrieky vocals. I wanted the whole album to be with melodious vocals. They really doubted that I could pull that through, so we had to

compromise, like you have to do in bands all the time. We figured we could make it fifty-fifty, one half more extreme, one half more melodious, to make a constant contradiction in the music between dark and light. We were pretty amazed with how the album was received by a lot of people, and it really inspired us to go even further in experimenting and trying out different things.

**And the spelling of HEart of the Ages was something you wanted to do, it wasn't a misprint?**

Not at all. Lyricwise, I was really into nature things, I had this huge forest in my backyard. I did a lot of wondering and thinking, walking around in the forest with a camera and taking pictures, drinking a few beers, just spending a lot of time in there. I was really inspired by these trips. When we did the album, I saw the title as a reference to nature, what made the whole cycle, the continuation of nature, what makes everything evolve. It was the heart of the whole system. Especially in Norway, we have this beautiful nature, and I thought it was both the heart, and it's art. That's why we capitalized both first letters.

**How involved were you personally in making the music?**

One of the guitarists, his name is Christian, he would come up with a few riffs and a few ideas for a song. Maybe we came to the rehearsal room with five or six different parts of music, and we would put them together, arrange them as a band, and what we did with the arrangements, we'd add some keyboards... When we worked on the first album we used a lot of keyboards, which we more or less stopped doing after that. But we experimented a little bit with that on the debut. We'd record the rehearsals on a four-track, and then I'd go home and try to put in some vocal arrangements, and when we'd go back to the rehearsal room we'd change a little bit of this and a little bit of that. We just made the songs over huge amounts of time, basically. Maybe it takes a year to finish a song, it's a long process to finish up the whole thing. I usually did lyrics, vocal arrangements, and wrote a few parts in between. It was me and this guy Christian who kept this whole thing together.

**Omnio, I'm guessing just from the live album, you would consider that your masterpiece.**

We went on tour after the debut album and played a lot of material from the debut album. After *Omnio*, we didn't tour that much. We had some gigs in Germany and maybe a couple gigs in Norway. We didn't really try out the *Omnio* album in live situations. When we did the final gig, we thought *Omnio* is the perfect sort of album for a concert like this, so we could check out the songs in live situations. We thought all the songs were so good that we might as well play the whole album in one go.

**Wasn't the original plan for the last show to play every song you'd ever recorded?**

We thought of that, but then we would have ended up with five hours worth of music. That would be one hell of a marathon. We tried to pick out what we considered our best material. At the final concert we were nine people on stage altogether, of course not everybody was playing at the same time, but there was a lot of people involved. It was a hard task picking out the songs for the gig.

**There is a real separation between disc one and disc two. Different people playing on it, different people mixed them. Why did you do that?**

We had two sets. We played one and a half hours, we had a break for thirty or forty minutes, and then we played the last part, at one and a half hours or something like that. On the first part, we used two guitarists, and a different bassist on each of the sets. The original bassist, who was in the band the whole time, he did the second part, and we had another bassist do the first part. I think altogether there were four guitarists, and obviously you can't have four guitarists so we just changed the band. Listening to the two discs, it sounds like the same band but the musicians are different technically so it's an interesting affair.

**Why did you decide to split *Omnia* up between the two sets?**

We needed a natural opening for the second set, and we thought this *Omnia* song is split into three parts, and this second part has the very instrumental opening and we saw that as a natural opening for the second set.

**Most bands I listen to wouldn't be caught dead thanking their mother from the stage.**

<laughs> I think she was pretty wasted, just like I was. The beer in Norway is hilariously expensive. There were a lot of Germans coming, and the beer is really cheap in Germany in comparison. My mother ended up buying beer for all these Germans in front of the stage, and they were really happy coming up to me after the gig and saying, "Your mom is really cool! She bought us this expensive beer!" I think she spent a lot of money. She was really enthusiastic, a heavily wasted drunk! She was in front, really happy, and when she got this salutation from the stage she was like "Wooo!" That was fun!

**On the liner notes of this CD you actually say 'No thanks' to Hammerheart Records. Did they screw up the re-release of the demo recordings that bad?**

I used to be really good friends with one of the guys with Hammerheart. I went to visit him a couple of times in Holland, he came up here. We spent some good times, had some good parties. When they wanted to start the label back in 95 or 96, they asked us if we wanted to re-release the demo. By that time, we'd sold something like two thousand tapes of that one. In the end we were tired of pressing more copies and still people wanted the demo so we thought to do a limited edition of a thousand copies. Or was it fifteen hundred? We did that to help them out because we had a pretty good name back then and they were a new label. We didn't sign a contract, we did this as friends on a handshake. A few years later, around 2000, they were in serious economic problems, without asking us they repressed the album for a few copies more. They didn't tell us anything! When I found out, I called them and said, "You're not asking us about this. What's the deal here?" They said, "We didn't know where to get hold of you guys, we didn't know any phone numbers or emails, so we thought it was OK, we're friends, right?" So I said, "OK, if you're going to make money on this..." and they said they'd share it fifty-fifty with us, and blah blah blah, so I said "OK, you printed this amount of copies, so we want this amount of money, that's fifty-fifty." "No no no, that's one hundred percent! We'd get nothing!" I know what they earn per

album. "No, we don't earn that much!" In the end, I just told them to take their filthy fucking money and shove it up their ass. That was basically the story, they fucked us big time.

**Fun fun fun.**

A bunch of assholes from Holland.

**I hope your relationship with Misanthropy was better.**

Yeah, that was pretty good. Definitely.

**Moving beyond IN THE WOODS... You guys have a lot of things going on. If you could explain the relationship between IN THE WOODS... and GREEN CARNATION?**

Before we did IN THE WOODS..., GREEN CARNATION existed a couple of years before we started IN THE WOODS... From that band, there was the drummer of IN THE WOODS..., and a bassist and guitarist, and the second guitarist was this guy Tchort who played in EMPEROR and SATYRICON. They split up in 91 or something, after they did this demo. After a little while, I formed a new band, we became IN THE WOODS... When this Tchort guy stopped playing with EMPEROR and SATYRICON and all these bands, he wanted to pick up GREEN CARNATION again. He took in the guitarist and bassist again, with a different drummer. Then the guitarist and bassist quit the band, and he took in the IN THE WOODS... drummer when we quit playing. And I think now there is the drummer and the bassist and the guitarist are in GREEN CARNATION, but it's a different bassist and guitarist than it was originally. It's a big salad.

**You had a part in the second GREEN CARNATION album. What do you think of that band?**

Well when you had called me the other day, I was just about to go to a gig with that guy! I've seen them live a couple of times. They are a really good band now, really tight, works really well on stage. Really good musicians, but after three or four songs it bores the hell out of me! I tell this to the guys as well because they're friends of mine, but I'm not a really huge fan of the music. For the second album, they asked if I wanted to be the singer of the band, but I just wanted to do some different stuff. I told them I could help them out so I came into the studio and did these little parts.

**If you could say a few words about the label you've got going?**

When we decided we wanted to stop doing IN THE WOODS..., we all wanted to do music, record and release albums. We figured out that we should set up a label, gather up the horses, and have a banner under which to release everything. We knew we would end up doing totally different stuff. It would be a label that would be totally independent from genre. It wasn't going to be a rock label, or a metal label, or a psychedelic label, it was going to be a big bag to put everything in. That was the basic idea about it, and it evolved into asking a lot of friends and musicians in the area if they wanted to join in on this promo sampler. It seems like the interest is picking up. For now, it's going to be a geographically limited label. We're only going to do local artists. There's an old saying in Norwegian, I don't know if you have something like it in the States, 'you don't cross the river to get some water.' Why would I go to, say, England to find a good band if I can find one just around the corner? We're going to do this

local thing, limit it to this, and see how it works. There's no master plan or anything behind it, we just want to pick up good stuff and release it.

**By the things you've been on lately, it seems like you're into dark folk music.**

You think it's more folkish?

**Acoustic guitars, totally away from rock and roll, year.**

The last year we were doing IN THE WOODS...., I had a lot of different projects. I think I did two hundred and fifty days in the studio doing a couple of IN THE WOODS... recordings, the NAERVAER album, and I was helping out a lot of local artists. I think I spent way too much time in the studio. I got totally burned out from doing music. I ended up not listening to any music at all, or if I did it was old recordings from the 20s, like jazzy, bluesy stuff. It was the only thing I could bear to listen to. It's been a break of like four or five years that I haven't listened to music. But when I make music, it doesn't sound like anything in particular because I'm not listening to anything that inspires me. It's fun to make music now. There's a lot of strange ideas coming out of it. At the moment I've been working on this album now, for three years, but I'm really slow. I write like two songs a year. I really hope to put everything together and make an album within a year or something.

**And then Karmakosmetix is basically underneath Prophecy Productions for business purposes?**

I had made a few attempts to be a businessman, but I really suck at it. I don't think I'm going to make any money on this. If we sell a few thousand copies of the live album, I'll be happy because then there will be money to put into new projects and recordings. As long as we can make some good, interesting music, I don't intend to make any money on it. That doesn't matter. As long as we have the money to record, it's really perfect.

**As an artist, how would you compare working with Misanthropy and Prophecy? As a fan, it seems like both labels deal with a lot of bands that not a lot of people want to hear.**

Both labels have two, three, four bands that sell pretty well, and they use their finances to put into more obscure projects that they want to have released. What they have in common is this musical integrity. They don't want to release stuff they don't want to listen to themselves. That's why they have, well Misanthropy had, a lot of obscure things besides the more commercial bands or whatever way you want to put it. It's always sort of difficult to work with a label, because they have their ideas and you have your ideas. As long as you have artistic integrity, I think that a label can do whatever they want as long as you can record whatever you want without limitations.

**Where did you come up with the name [Ovl Svithjod, but I wasn't about to attempt to pronounce it to him] you used on earlier recordings?**

In the very beginning, say ten, fifteen years ago, I was really into the Norse mythology. I found this name, Svithjod, he came from Sweden over to Norway, this is in mythology, he came to these three wise men, and he made himself an idiot so they would tell him everything he wanted about the kingdom. Made a fool out of himself to gain knowledge. I was sixteen or seventeen when I came across this name, and I thought it was great and I wanted to use it. At the same time, I thought

it was really pretentious, so I wanted to make a joke about it as well. I found this English, lordish title, it was Overlord. Overlord Svithjod, that's a great name! A little bit of pretentiousness and humor!

**Half of everything I read about your band says there was a vocalist change halfway through because you changed your name.**

I was getting on to twenty-two, and I was thinking it was a childhood kind of thing. I wanted to take back my own, familiar name.

**Hopefully you're still not keeping yourself away from music these days, because I have to ask what five albums you're listening to lately.**

I've been a lot into Tom Waits lately. The albums I'm more or less into are *Swordfishtrumpbones* and *Mule Variations*. I listen a lot to *Blood on the Tracks* by Bob Dylan. *The Man Comes Around*, by Johnny Cash. And the second album by Manu Chao, *Proxima Estacion Esperanza*. Have you heard of Manu Chao? He was born in France I think, but he has an Algerian father and a Spanish mother. He's doing this kind of mix up between traditional music, folksy stuff, but he sings in Arabic and Portuguese and French and Spanish, doing all these weird things. I was traveling in South America a few years ago, and I saw this guy play live in Bolivia. I was totally blown away! Every time I listen to him I get this South American vibe, a nostalgia trip. Those are my five most precious albums right now

**What was the last metal album you've listened to?**

I don't know if you can categorize it as metal, but it was a Misanthropy release, an Italian band called MONUMENTUM [album *In Absentia Christi*]. Do you remember that one? It should be that one, or maybe MAYHEM's *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas*. It sounds really weird but that's one of the few records I listen to occasionally. It's a really good album.

**Any final words for the reading audience?**

This is for America, so I can do some political stuff?

**If you'd like...**

No, I don't think I want to do that. This will end up being something really silly. Last night, I proposed to my girlfriend, so now we're going to marry! You're the first one to know!

#### **Discography**

with IN THE WOODS...:

*HEart of the Ages* (1995 Misanthropy)

*A Return to the Isle of Men\** (1996 Hammerheart)

*Ommio* (1997 Misanthropy)

*Strange in Stereo* (1999 Misanthropy)

*Three Times Seven on a Pilgrimage* (2000 Prophecy)

*Liveatthecaledonianhall* (2003 The

End/Karmakosmetix)

with GREEN CARNATION:

*Light of Day, Day of Darkness* (2000 The

End/Prophecy)

with NAERVAER:

*Skifninger* (2000 Prophecy)

with DRAWN:

*A New World?* (1999 Prophecy)

\* Re-release of demo material

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## Feature Interview

# JAG PANZER

*So JAG PANZER is an elite band in heavy metal, a fact which is much more amazing when you consider that they are pretty much a straight-up heavy metal band, are American, and have been going over twenty years now. We've covered JAG PANZER in these pages before, and unless all of their talent slides out of their ears, we will again. But that will be about albums, and songs. Here we have a special little package that they've just put out... a collection of early songs re-recorded and released under the name Decade of the Nail-Spiked Bat. Most of what is available from the band is from their 1997 Century Media-sponsored comeback and later, with the idea that this is some band from the dawn of US heavy metal no more than a marketing gimmick if you weren't around back in the day... (and really when there were legitimate reissues of that early material in the early 90s, without the band being active in the scene, it comes off like a Sentinel Steel reissue is perceived... a curiosity for people interested from the time, but not as a must-have for the current fan base). It's largely been an issue of legalities with their old guitar player not wanting the old material properly reissued these days, for reasons unknown (and the only thing I know about the guy is that he was in JAG PANZER and doesn't want anyone to hear it now so I'm not the best candidate to hunt the guy down and ask him). So at least the re-recording isn't some sort of gimmick novelty release, but something that was necessary if people were going to hear these songs. It's an excellent value. You get some fun (as in, 'that would so not go over today') cover art that they were actually planning to use fifteen years ago. You've got explanations of what every song is in the liner notes, and you've got a more straightforward JAG PANZER delivering two albums worth of classic underground heavy metal from when underground heavy metal was young. What more could you ask for? As for the material itself, it is what it is. Not nearly as textured as current material, and not the all time ultimate metal classic forever album like, say, Number of the Beast or Ride the Lightning were, an album that defined metal and inspired listeners in such a way that it laid a foundation for metal to still live even when the media spotlight decided to shine somewhere else. Yet it's solid material that does hold up as quality so many years later. There's no 'Oh dear god what were you thinking' in the music itself. Still, it's an interesting concept, a band with two distinct, storied stages of their career, separated by many years of inactivity. Time to go down memory lane with guitar player Mark Briody...*

**So how are you doing this afternoon?**

Busy, talking to people in Europe all day.

**How's that going?**

It's gone OK. This is a hard album to do press for, having to take that trip down memory lane constantly.

**Decade of the Nail-Spiked Bat. That's one of the coolest album names I've heard in quite some time.**

I either hear that or I hear that it's the lamest title ever! One or the other.

**What kind of loser would call that a lame title?**

<laughs> A few of them!

**Why did you pick that name?**

Our drummer Rikard always picks the title names for some reason. The song License to Kill on *Ample Destruction*, that's the opening track, references nail-spiked bat a couple times in the lyrics. I think Harry used to have a nail-spiked bat that he would bring on stage.

**I know there's an explanation in the CD of where the cover art is from, but that's an interesting looking painting there.**

It is.

**I know it fits into the whole theme, but if it was my album I don't know that I'd want that to be what people are looking at on the shelves.**

We had to keep with the oldschool theme. It was the same artist that did the EP and *Ample Destruction*, the same chick is on both of those album covers. Thematically, that's the third painting in the series. We had to make it really abundantly clear that this is entirely an oldschool release so that eliminated Travis Smith covers. But we are back with Travis for the next one.

**Were the 80s really out of reality that this girl's outfit would be considered cool looking?**

Yeah, that would have been a cool cover in the 80s! People liked our other art, same theme, same guy, it was different then. Look at that EXODUS cover for *Bonded By Blood*.

**I like the picture of you guys posing around the car with the engine.**

That's a classic US metal car, a '69 Camaro! That's another thing, that used to be the way to do photos in the 80s, to pose around a car. But rappers have hijacked that. Posing around your Mercedes or your Hummer or your Escalade now. That's another oldschool thing, you have to pose around the muscle car. That's a monster seven hundred horsepower '69 Camaro that's worth a ton of money. And we got to put our grubby hands all over it for a photo session! [The guy that owned it] was actually disappointed that only Harry wanted to ride in the car. I didn't have any desire to do 140mph on mountain roads. Harry did, though. He said it was better than a roller coaster at an amusement park.

**Why the decision to re-record old material?**

Joey Tafolla wouldn't... The first choice would be just to re-issue the old stuff. There is a demand for it. I like the new stuff better myself, so I don't quite understand the demand, but there is one. Lately, the demand has been met by bootleggers who have done an absolutely shitty job of bootlegging it. In order to put these out officially, the only thing we could do is re-record them.

**Did you see the Infernal Combustion headline? ["Century Media Rejects Fuck Joey Tafolla In His Ear As Title For Jag Panzer Best-Of."]**

That was hilarious! Century Media sent me that. It was a riot! It made my week.

**Obviously, what he's wanting for a dollar amount is unfeasible or you'd just give it to him and get the things re-released. Is he that far out of touch with reality as far as the demand for 80s metal re-issues?**

I don't even know. I haven't talked to him in years. I really have nothing to say to him. I left the whole issue up between Century Media and Joey. He has a pretty top music attorney, and I don't know if she is not aware of the market value of this, or if Joey himself is setting the demands, but Century Media told me it is exponentially higher than what they thought it was worth.

**I wonder if he thinks it's worth that much or just not wanting it out there at all.**

I could understand not wanting it out there, but it's already been bootlegged all over the place. Plus, we had reissued a couple times before which he had signed for. I can't guess what his reasons are, but I guess he does have his reasons.

**As far as what these songs are, is this everything before the comeback, or just selected songs?**

It's pretty much everything. It's everything from the first EP, it's everything from *Ample Destruction* except for a couple that Joey Tafolla wrote pretty much all by himself. Even though on the album we give the credit to everybody for every song, and we always put the publishing for everybody on every song, in reality there are songs where one person is the driving force. We chose not to re-record those. Then there's a few demo tracks we had never recorded so we put those on there.

**How early in the process did you decide this was going to be a two CD thing?**

After we decided what really had to be put on there, that was pushing the limits of one CD. Once I got input from some other band members about what they wanted, it was definitely over one CD. I asked Century Media if they minded a double and they said that's fine.

**The material itself, it is a lot different than the newer stuff. How hard was it to get into the mindset to record this old stuff considering what you've been doing?**

Once we had a game plan about how we were going to do it, we approached it totally different than the way we do stuff with Jim Morris. Once we had a game plan, I started listening to a lot of stuff I used to listen to then in order to get in the right frame of mind. Going into the project, I kind of dreaded it but I ended up having fun.

**Would you say the actually performances were easier to do now than they were then?**

Definitely. I have to say the performances on this are really good. There's no cut and paste or punching in or any of that. This is real playing throughout everything on here and everybody is just spot on with everything. On a lot of things, I prefer the newer material, because of the production, the layering, but on this release the actual performances were very cool.

**Any problems with anyone trying to soup up the songs? Are they enhanced or are they the way they were?**

They're enhanced the way we thought they would have been enhanced back then. Rikard's a much stronger drummer than the guy we had then [Rick Hilyard]. That guy did a good job back then, I'm not coming down on him, but back then had he possessed the skills of Rikard, he would have played the songs the way Rikard

played them now. Chris played leads where the leads were supposed to be, but I think he played them a little more ruthlessly than on the original. That's kind of how we approached it. There are no huge changes.

**Since there shouldn't be a lot of effort needed to sell this to JAG PANZER fans, what would you say the value of this kind thing is for people not already familiar with the band?**

It's real metal. This is really raw and unproduced, unprocessed, almost no effects. Put a mic in front of a guitar and lay it down. I'm not saying it's any better because I probably prefer the other way, a big production, but it is cool to listen to this. It's different than what's out today.

**In the early 80s with the way heavy metal was, there weren't bands stretching the way they do now. It was really simpler. Would you say that was the byproduct of it being a relatively new kind of music, or was that just how it was?**

There were huge budget constraints back then. I'm surprised I never hear bands bring that up. That's the way it was with us. We had songs on the first EP that we envisioned big choirs on, but it sucked because you can't pull it off with three guys. The intent and the idea was still there, versus now when we can actually do the stuff. Today you hear this big multi layer music like BLIND GUARDIAN which is very cool. Back then, you couldn't do it. If you had a huge budget you went to a twenty-four track studio. So we went to a sixteen-track. There is no way you're going to get that *Nightfall in Middle-Earth* fifty tracks of guitars in a sixteen track studio.

**If something like *Nightfall in Middle-Earth* had come out in 1983, would people have had their minds blown or would there be complaints that it was too wimpy with all of the keyboards and choirs?**

I think it would have been huge. You would have had a few people complaining about the keyboards, but an album like that is such an excellent album, in any time period. Maybe the audience would have been a little bit different, but your QUEEN fans back then would have loved it, your basic metal fans back then would have loved it. A good record is a good record.

**The advancement in your material, I mean a lot of these songs are good and they're catchy, but what you're doing these days shows you're with the 2000s even if you are 'just' a heavy metal band. And completely breaking my train of thought, I love this, the International House of Note Singing. I don't want to forget that.**

<laughs> I think you're the only one that picks up on our crazy credits. We do them every record, and you are the only one who ever mentions it. You picked up on the Ancient Order of the Iron Eagle Men's Choir.

**How can anybody miss that? It's the little details that make you realize you're not farting around, you're paying attention to what you're doing.**

And you were the only one to pick up on the St. Hubbins Quality footwear on *Thane to the Throne* [uh... I was?- ed]. There's crazy credits all over the place on every Jag Panzer album that no one picks up on.

**Did you do that in the early days?**

No, we were too serious back then. This is metal, you've got to be serious!

**With the more melodic metal these days, it's accepted that people are going to mention QUEEN and RUSH. In the early days, even IRON MAIDEN, even if they had prog rock influences, it didn't really sound like it. The mindset back then as far prog rock versus metal stuff, why did there seem to be a strict separation?**

There was a huge separation. There was a big separation, people even looked down on bands like PRIEST back then because they predated the New Wave of British Heavy Metal so they weren't as cool. They were generally liked but they weren't as cool as WITCHFYNDY or VENOM or ANGEL WITCH or IRON MAIDEN. There was a huge distinction back then basically to any band that sold platinum albums. That'll take care of all your prog rock right there because that was huge back then. The underground was very much metal and that's it. I remember just the word melodic was considered a bad word in 1982. I remember somebody told me they heard the new DIO solo album, and I asked if it was any good. They said, "There aren't any melodies on it at all!" And I'm like, "Yeah, all right!"

**Wow. Um.**

I knew what a melody was, but it was just metal slang back then. A melody meant wimpy music.

**That's brilliant. No melodies on the DIO solo album. So, what happened to metal then if that was cool then? Where was the major shift to where we got to now?**

The shift started with the commercial band like RATT getting really big while still having really good guitar playing. You couldn't really dog the guitar playing in those bands. That sort of opened people's minds. You can expand metal because those guys were keeping the metal guitar with this really pop sounding music. Technology helped a lot, synthesizers started sounding cooler. Early synthesizers just dominated the mix because they were so fat sounding. Just this big, weird, analog, fat sound like mid period RUSH. That really wasn't going to work with metal, but once synthesizers started getting more realistic sounding with the instruments, metal bands realized you could start incorporating that in your music.

**In one of our earlier interviews, you said your earlier material was compared to VENOM. I can hear more of the comparison now, but I'm guessing that Harry was singing closer to the way he is now than...**

He was a little wilder back then but he basically sounds the same.

**I don't know if it's the re-recording or if metal was a lot more closed back then but I don't hear a lot of VENOM.**

I never did, even when that first came out. I was surprised they were referenced. I thought VENOM was cool but I didn't think we sounded anything like them.

**Where did you end up becoming a more melodic band instead of one of these really heavy bands?**

Harry's voice, and most of the subsequent singers we had, lended themselves better to the melodic stuff. As I saw metal taking different directions into the more strange stuff, like TESTAMENT's *The New Order*, that's probably as extreme as I would go as far as something I would listen to a lot and really enjoy it. I guess by extreme I mean taking melody away from the

vocal line. As much as I like something like TESTAMENT, it wasn't suited for our lineup and wouldn't be suited to Harry's voice. It was really just the matter of focusing on the strength of the band and with Harry the strength is definitely melody. When *Ample* came out, we had Joey Tafolla so that took away some of the perception, because bands like VENOM were definitely not guitar hero bands. That was around the same time Yngwie was coming out with STEELER and subsequently ALCATRAZZ. That was more pushing us in that vein with Joey's input.

**Going past *Ample Destruction*. We've already talked about how for whatever reason it was impossible to get a European deal.**

For some bizarre reason. It makes no sense to me! The biggest magazine back then, aside from Kerrang!, was Metal Forces, and Metal Forces was all over *Ample Destruction*. They loved it! I have no idea how we could not get a deal.

**I'm still puzzled how nothing happened after *Ample Destruction* for you in the US, either.**

Harry went and joined RIOT, so after Harry left, we had a few other singers. We had a guy named Chris Cronk for awhile, he sang for a few months and then he went and joined Fates Warning for a week. We had Bob Parduba that we did *Chain of Command* with. You have to understand the mentality back then. We were very young, we'd done the indie thing, it's not working very well, we've got to get a major deal. That was the focus of the band. The indie scene back then meant you didn't tour, there was really little support of anything so we thought to survive we had to have a major deal. Get band members in, do major label showcases, and when we didn't get a deal we'd always have guys quit. It was a revolving door for band members for a long time.

**Can you imagine bands being like that now? Not getting a major label deal so everybody quits?**

Now people don't want a major label deal.

**"A major label is showing up? Damn it, I'm not playing this show!"**

Did they pay to get in?

**Do you consider metal healthier as a whole now that it's almost completely independent, or then when you had lots of stuff on majors.**

It's healthier now for a fan because you have so many ways to hear new bands. The easiest way is to sign onto their website and download stuff. As a fan there's a lot more options to hear bands, a lot more options to buy metal, so many more options. As a musician, the indie scene now sucks because you're at the mercy of how much your record company wants to push you. If they push you a whole lot, you sell good. If they don't push you, you don't sell. If you don't sell, you get bad budgets, you don't get tour support. A lot of the indies are like mini-majors now.

**It amazed me opening up foreign magazines and seeing full page CRADLE OF FILTH, AMORPHIS, and BLIND GUARDIAN major label ads. Back in your starting days, that really was not that rare. Do you think the fan mentality as far as Major Label Bad is hurting the metal scene?**

Right now? No. You have your die-hard heavy metal fans who are pretty knowledgeable, they can see through all that. But I think you have a lot of people who are mesmerized by the big full paged ads, they see

the major label name on the bottom and think these guys have to be better than everyone else. They're on Capitol!

**I can't say I understand Century Media anymore so I can't say anything about understanding major labels these days!**

We haven't gotten our budget from Century Media yet so I can't say whether I understand them or not. <laughs> If they told me my requested budget was approved right now then I would totally understand them!

**I guess it's a sign of the times if they're signing more hardcore sounding bands. But damn, I hate that crap.**

I see a lot of people complain about the labels, but they have to understand it is a business. They have employees, they have to turn a profit. Century Media and Nuclear Blast do not exist to bring you cool music and not make a profit.

**That's what other labels are for!**

In the early 80s, indie labels were just there to bring you good music and break even. But those days are long gone.

**You were actually part of a tour where you got to see the fruits of the current mentality. What was it like opening up the IN FLAMES, ICED EARTH tour?**

That was a lot of people every show! We had our share of people liking it, but at least we had a big crowd to play to most of the nights. A couple shows they moved us really early. In Pittsburgh I think we went on forty-five minutes before the tickets said doors opened! We played to the staff sweeping up! Other than that it was good exposure. We played for a lot more people than we usually would.

**You guys came back on Century Media right around the time ICED EARTH and IN FLAMES started getting their push in the US. How did it end up that they're the big draws and you're the opening band? What the hell?**

By the time we actually signed to Century Media, *Dark Saga* had just come out. ICED EARTH already had one of their big breaking albums before we were even out of the gate. IN FLAMES, they do well with the target audience in the US. They're a cross of the underground metal and the metal that's a lot more popular, like SLIPKNOT. I guess I shouldn't call that metal, whatever that music is, IN FLAMES is a crossover. So they sell well. ICED EARTH, Jon Schaffer, he has a mind for this stuff. He does everything right for a successful music career. The guy should write a book.

**He sure does piss people off along the way.**

He says what he thinks. He's not a politically correct person.

**I'd consider JAG PANZER by far the superior band of the three, and in reading reviews of the shows, you guys are glossed over so they can talk about the main bands. It drives me nuts.**

It's unfortunate, but with a tour like that, they've got their minds made up who they're going to like and who they're not going to like before getting in the door. And there's the mentality that the opening band isn't as good no matter how good you are. It doesn't help when you have sound men that are keeping your sound low, you have a fourth of the lights. We got frustrated a few times on the tour, and we would just tell the light man

just to give us a white light bulb. We'll just play to the house lights if we have to.

**As far as *Decade of the Nail-Spiked Bat*, do you think there are a lot of people who aren't aware that the band was around for this long?**

I don't think so. This is more of an old-school thing. A lot of people are evidently interested in this music, and I think this is something for them. I don't think this is going to increase the visibility of JAG PANZER at all. The next album is for that.

**How is that coming along?**

The writing's half done. It's along the lines of *Mech Warfare*. A little more aggressive. A little bit faster and heavier. The plan now is to hit the studio in April or May. I talked to Jim Morris, he's got that time free. I talked to Travis Smith, he's got the time to do a cover, so we're waiting on Century Media to give us a green light.

**We might have stuff by this time next year!**

Definitely then.

**It's already been two years since the last one!**

I don't want *Decade of the Nail-Spiked Bat* to be around a long time as being representative of our latest album. I think it's cool and it's a good record, but it's not representative of what we do now at all.

**I do have to ask about the DVD. When I got the DVD, I don't know, I think of JAG PANZER as this world class awesome band, and the DVD was just this basic, it wasn't awful or anything but it wasn't world class material that I thought the band should have.**

I remember everybody telling me at every tour stop. "Jim hates it! Jim is slamming your DVD all over the internet!"

**Great. Nobody tells me they're telling other people this.**

For a time, I was seriously hearing it at every show.

**OK.**

On to your question.

**I understand the live footage, you're not going to be playing in an arena, but when it comes to the traveling in Europe footage, how did you decide what was going to go into that?**

I used to make tons of little videos like that. It came down to what people around here were interested in seeing. A lot of people would stop by our house, people on our crew, that was one of the things people wanted to see. "Show us that Europe thing you did." It's pretty realistic, the whole bunkbed thing, it's like a low budget college dorm.

**I guess I was spoiled with the idea of tour videos that were filmed with the idea they were going to be released, so there's some sort of story being told with the footage. You guys had some clips of different situations where it doesn't matter what order it's in.**

The whole DVD, I approached Century Media with the idea and they thought we'd sell fifty copies. I just wanted to prove them wrong! I hate when I get the impression that people are trying to hold us down. "I'll show you, I'll pay for this DVD by myself and sell a bunch!"

**And apparently you did!**

We sold out pretty quick. I snagged a box for my private collection, and that box has been dwindling way down. My wife has been selling them without telling

me! I had a box of thirty, I think I have eight now. At some point in time I'm going to have to hide these!

**Well that's pretty much all I got for the questions. What five albums are you enjoying lately?**

The new Iced Earth. Lullacry, Be My God. I know that's got their old singer on the album. I think those are the only two. I'm working on the new Iced Earth DVD so I listen to that tons of times. Those are the only two. I have to know that Iced Earth material because I have to be prepared.

**Any final words?**

New album next year, European tour next year. We're playing England for the first time next year. I don't know how big of an English readership you have.

**Two people.**

Well you two people, be there!

#### **Discography**

*Ample Destruction* (1984 Azra)  
*Dissident Alliance* (1994 Pavement/Rising Sun)  
*The Fourth Judgement* (1997 Century Media)  
*The Age of Mastery* (1998 Century Media)  
*Thane to the Throne* (2000 Century Media)  
*Mechanized Warfare* (2001 Century Media)  
*Decade of the Nail-Spiked Bat* (2003 Century Media)

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### Feature Interview

# Kayo Dot

*We remember MAUDLIN OF THE WELL, don't we? Good. Well, they've either broken up and some of the members got back together as KAYO DOT, or they just changed their name and started doing a bit different material. Take your pick. As we'll see, the name change was part of a master plan to move away from the metal scene. In their case it's probably a good thing as the metal scene keeps getting more and more conservative and these guys just don't have any ideas that will fit in. The new album *Choirs of the Eye* takes the MAUDLIN OF THE WELL twists on music and twists them around again with more open, flowing compositions of (to my ears) foreign and weird music... but compelling enough that I want to come back to it and figure it out, not send it off to family somewhere as a revenge plot for childhood trauma. Well, my mother likes MEATLOAF so it may work for that anyway. But the point is this isn't a band playing lip service to the notion of creativity, and their idea of 'being different' isn't just a marketing sales point: This is a band that uses the trappings and means of rock music but has no use for conventional structures nor any regard for the 'entertainment' of a visitor. It's only heavy in short spurts, bizarrely putting a regular listener off balance during the calm moments... It's difficult to explain,*

*because I really don't completely get it myself. I just listen more, go, "Oh, OK!" a little more each time, and I have violent urges to interview the creators. Once again along for the ride are composed and multi-instrumentalist Toby Driver and guitarist Greg Massi...*

**Once again, you guys have done it. I don't know what to make of it at this stage in the game. But we'll start with the obvious question. What happened to MAUDLIN OF THE WELL, and what the hell is KAYO DOT?**

Greg Massi: The simplest answer is, we switched labels, we lost a lot of band members from MAUDLIN OF THE WELL, about half of our members, and the direction of the music just seemed to be a lot different than what we were doing. Well not a lot different, but just going in a new direction. It just made sense with everything being new, we wanted to create a new identity for ourselves. The name KAYO DOT, our goal was to get a band name for it that didn't have any preconceived notions. For example, the name MAUDLIN OF THE WELL, the words in that band name have definite connotations when you hear them. We really wanted to get a band name that wasn't defined by the music which represented it.

**What did happen with the old label, and how did you hook up with the new label?**

Toby Driver: With the old label, we just kind of needed things to move a little bit faster.

GM: [John] Zorn liked us, and wanted to do the record with us. At the time, it would just be a better move for us to go with Tzadik instead of Dark Symphonies. That's really it.

**I know that Zorn has sort of been on the fringe of the metal scene before, but it seems weird that you would end up on his label.**

TD: I agree. His label isn't one that normally signs bands. They do have some bands on the other sections, like the Japan section that we don't fit into. Under the series that we're on, they don't have bands, it's just composers. We discussed this, and he was into the idea. He said it was weird and that he liked having a band on the composer's series, he'd never done that before. One of the things that this record coming out on Tzadik emphasizes is that it doesn't easily qualify as a metal record. When you say it's surprising for a metal band to sign to this label, yes it would be surprising for a metal band, but this isn't really defined as a metal record. It's more like a contemporary classical record. There are a lot of undeniable elements of metal in it.

**Your past albums haven't been easily identifiable as metal, but it seems that anything that has strong metal elements in it has nowhere else to be categorized.**

TD: A lot of what defines metal is structure. The things we had done in the past with the old band, there were things easily definable as a riff. With the new stuff, it doesn't have anything riffy. The riffing of rock and metal is not really present. It's mostly away from metal in its form, you don't see metal bands using compositional forms the way we are.

**Are you expecting a lot of your new fans to continue on with you or is it out of sight, out of mind as far as being promoted to the metal world?**

GM: Definitely one of our goals was to try to broaden our audience. A lot of people who have been fans of us

since the first albums are definitely picking up the album and are interested in it. So far, we have gotten reviews done primarily metal zines, and there is definitely a conscious effort from us to promote it to some of the more metal publications, like you. I think we sent one to Metal Maniacs too. We didn't want to just promote it to the metal scene, which is what our old stuff was. We had one hundred and fifty CDs sent out to tiny zines, and I'm not sure how many reviews were done of it, but that's all it was sent out to. This time, we did send out a few promos already, and we did keep in contact with the zines we felt were important to keep in contact with, but we definitely wanted to limit sending promos to just any old metal webzine out there. We want to promote ourselves to other places. We're trying to keep people from the old audience as much as possible.

TD: You know as well as anybody that a label you attach to music is for marketability. If you call something metal, then it's immediately going to have a presumption made about it before it's even heard. We're not turning our backs on it, but we want anybody to be able to get into it, not just the metal crowd.

**Going out into more experimental music, is there really the infrastructure anywhere near the one metal has built up for marketing and selling CDs?**

TD: Another purpose of doing this, we are trying to broaden the audience, maybe sell more records, that'd be great, but I personally am interested in having a certain level of respect for what I work on. If you just go around saying you're a metal band, there are a lot of elements of the metal scene, that not everybody in the scene has... If you look at the larger publications, they do speak for the scene, and then they have ads in them that say, "This album is the most hateful album ever." The most visible things are saying things like that and representing your scene like that, and then these same people complain when their music isn't taken seriously by people outside the scene. We are interested in being musicians for our entire lives, we're interested in making a living off of it, and I don't think people in our band are the type of people who want to be in bar bands doing metal covers until we're fifty. We want to go places and progress and do a lot of different types of things.

GM: By the way, our album is the most hateful album, I'd just like to add that.

**So what the hell is wrong with metal where it accepts the 'most hateful album ever' and is stuck in such a form that people like you feel constrained to be just within metal?**

GM: The people who are the most visible and make the most noise can be very ignorant. If they're not ignorant, they're just used to things being a certain way, and they're not interested in moving past what they've done. I've noticed in the scene, there are a growing number of people who look for innovation, or to use the term loosely, progression in the music they listen to. There are a good amount out there but they're being stifled because the metal scene is dominated by tradition.

TD: You have a scene that's largely made up of outcasts from normality. Then they become part of this scene and they belong. Or maybe they're just hateful and need an outlet for their hate, and that's what they find in their music. Or maybe they're resentful that they are the

outcasts and so they need to respond by being hateful with their music. You know how bands on their CDs would have their thanks list and then they would have a Fuck You list.

GM: We were all miserable in high school. We all have moments of being complete outcasts. But you have to get over that. You can't be stuck in that angry at the world phase for your entire life. They want to have a place where they belong, but they don't want to mess with it, they don't want to ruin it, so they just conform to what the scene dictates. I thought we were really working our butts off on new music that we were hoping people would appreciate. We got some pretty good review from all the metal zines we got reviewed in. People saying this is the kind of band you should be listening to. Stretch out musically. And then having the CDs not sell at all, and basically being ignored by the scene in general, it seemed kind of weird.

TD: If you as a person in the metal scene, or a band, don't display that you're metal enough, then there's something wrong with you and they hate you. It is true that people in the metal scene are outcasts and have a community. They can exercise this elitism that they couldn't exercise in their lives outside the scene by looking down on people who aren't quite as metal.

GM: We're not talking about everybody in the scene, just talking about some general aspects of it.

**I notice a lot of people are getting excited when a band does a good impression of the sound a fan first got into metal with. If a fan first got into metal with SLAYER, whenever he hears something that sounds like SLAYER, he goes, "Yeah!" But I'm wired weird. The first thing that hit me when I got into metal was that it was just so new and so powerful. It wasn't the sound, it was the new expression. So it's only when a band hits me with something new that I go nuts. If I hear something that sounds like NAPALM DEATH I'm not going to act like I did when I first heard NAPALM DEATH!**

TD: When I first got into TIAMAT, they were the first band that I listened to that had that atmospheric thing. When I first heard them, I thought it was great, and I wanted to listen to more bands that sounded just like them. I bought a whole bunch of CDs that I thought would sound like them, and nobody did. There were bands that were similar but nobody did it as good as TIAMAT did on *Wildhoney*. I kept looking for another *Wildhoney* and I couldn't find it. I don't know how people can find bands that sound like their favorite band and still like them. No one can do it as well as your favorite band!

**I would agree.**

TD: Nobody does SLAYER like SLAYER, so why try to find another SLAYER?

GM: I went through the same thing in college when I first heard BLIND GUARDIAN. "This is great! Power metal rules!" Then I found out ninety-five percent of the power metal bands suck. I still listen to BLIND GUARDIAN and RHAPSODY and... well, not very much else other than that nowadays...

TD: Maybe everybody starts off in a similar frame of mind but you grow out of it.

**There's the one purchase you make that makes you realize it isn't all cool. But one thing I noticed**

earlier, Greg, is you wanted to shy away from the word progressive.

GM: Yes.

**Explain that.**

GM: I don't like using the word progressive when talking about metal, because you get the whole prog metal thing which we've debated. There are a lot of bands that are being labeled these days as progressive, but they really aren't. The word progressive has become very hollow to me in the last five years. It just gets thrown around.

TD: It's a misused term.

**There are exceptions of course, but isn't it interesting that you have to go back to the 70s to find interesting 'progressive' music?**

If you're talking about the progressive rock genre, yes.

**I'm talking about things labeled progressive. There are other things out there that might fit the term progressive but it's used to describe the descendents of KING CRIMSON or GENESIS or RUSH. It just gets less interesting as time goes on.**

GM: I'm no expert on the 70s, but it just seems like there were so many bands, and genres really didn't exist the way they do now. You had so many different bands coming from different backgrounds and progressive actually meant something at that point. You'd have bands like YES or KING CRIMSON, or just looking at Miles Davis and his experiments in the 70s. Again, I'm not an expert on these bands, but as a casual music observer it seems that was a time period where you could do whatever you want and it seemed like there needed to be a label, and that's where progressive meant something. Everyone was trying to be progressive. They weren't calling themselves progressive rock, it was a label somebody else gave to them. I think the label has become very meaningless.

TD: A lot of the argument now is that all of the ideas have been used up. So what's going on now is people are doing contrived shit in an effort to be progressive. Maybe in the 70s, a lot of things you would have been able to think of were used, so now it gets down to something like fucking FARMAKON, who play metal but then the singer does some weird stuff and they're supposed to be interesting. I think there is a lot of progressive music going on now. A lot of really good shit now. New stuff. But it's not necessarily in metal. Some people sit home and download music all day, and I don't do that. So I hear maybe one new record a month. So I don't want to sound authoritative, but a lot of what I'm listening to is unique. It's cool shit.

**But that stuff isn't labeled progressive. DREAM THEATER have chased true progressives away from the term. So as far as the new album, you say that some members have come and gone. There's still a battalion of people that look to have performed on the latest album. As far as the sound has developed, how important is each individual member to the overall sound these days?**

TD: I think it's very important. Everybody plays their own way. When you're writing a part and you know who is going to be playing it ahead of time, you've definitely composed it to be played by that person. All of the people that are on this record, we've pretty much worked with all of them before. You've got to think of it like the way a composer would do a collection of their

pieces. They just pick musicians they need at that time. It's very important, the individual musician. The part would be different if a different person was playing.

GM: A lot of the people playing on the record aren't playing with us live. The horn players... But they're people who we're friends with, they were in college with Toby, or friends with Terran [Olson], our old keyboard player.

TD: Since there's a lot of people on our record, it seems like we use session players. But we don't use session players, we get buddies of ours to do it.

**How is it different going from recording one album, to recording two albums, to going back and recording one album?**

GM: They were all recorded in very different ways. The first album was just a collection of tracks we did at Toby's college over a course of three years. We had a lot of time on our hands to play around with different things and develop ideas. Going into *Bath* and *Leaving Your Body Map*, we consciously went in to record all these songs and we had to work very efficiently.

TD: But the songs on *Bath* and *Leaving Your Body Map* were old songs...

GM: They'd already been written.

TD: But with this new one, it was a lot more intense than the double. These were all new pieces. Everything on *Bath* and *Leaving Your Body Map* had been recorded before except maybe three or four songs. Everything had been demoed at the free studio at the school. They were old songs so we were familiar with them and knew what they were going to sound like. With KAYO DOT, it pretty much only existed... I knew what it was going to sound like in my head, and it was an issue of trying to explain to everybody else what it was supposed to sound like and everybody making it happen.

GM: When we did the double album, even though we had so many songs, working on this album, these five songs, we worked longer on this one overall in terms of days. This album is definitely the biggest of all the ones we've done, just in terms of density and the textures. The layering. Trying to come up with a cohesive vision. It was very intense and time consuming.

**Did anyone ever solve the big puzzle of the last two albums?**

TD: If they did, they didn't tell us.

GM: That goes back to how many people actually bought them, or how many people cared enough.

TD: You'd only see it if you actually bought the CD and have the CD and not download it. So how many people have it? Two thousand people, something like that.

GM: And how many of them were interested enough to figure it out?

TD: It's still a treat that's there for anyone who's interested.

**So are you ever going to have a clue book up on the website?**

GM: We did the secret song.

TD: The secret song, yeah.

GM: Did I give a copy of that to you at ProgPower?

No.

GM: Oh. I had copies with me.

TD: The lyrics to the song were clues on how to decipher the other two records.

**About the new album, I've been listening to it for about a week. It's a hell of a lot to take in. It's good, I like listening to it. I don't think, "What the hell are these idiots thinking?" I listen to it and go, "Man, I'm an idiot, I don't get this at all!" First, where does *Choirs of the Eye* come from?**

TD: There's a line in one of the MAUDLIN OF THE WELL songs that says something similar to that.

GM: There is? I didn't know that. Oh!

["I was swept away/When the choirs in your shiny eyes cast/Little drops of water on everything"- from Blight of River-Systems from *My Fruit Psychobells... A Seed Combustible*]

TD: So that name is in one way a nod to the old band, and in another way it kind of means... It's best noticed in anime, when someone's in great duress, how their eyes kind of shake. The name isn't about anime, but it's about when you look at someone and their eyes are shaking. It's not so deep. Everything we did with the old band had a lot of meaning and was really deep. We wanted to do stuff this time around that didn't have layers of meaning like that. We had never worked that way before. Every letter of every line was important. Every picture. This time around, it's supposed to speak for itself. You shouldn't really think about it too much. It doesn't hold a key to your soul.

GM: I wasn't in on the conversation about the album title. That was like last year.

TD: I was going to call it Please Let Me See Through the Palms of My Hands and everybody said no.

**How many listens do you think it should take before someone can be reasonably expected to get the album?**

TD: One of the caveats of being a musician is that you can never perceive your music objectively. Never. Never never never never never. I wish I could, but I can't.

**When you bring a song idea to one of these musicians, what's the average amount of times they have to play it through without forgetting what comes next?**

TD: The horn players and the string players, we can write their music out on paper. So that's not as difficult as it might seem.

GM: From when we first got started on the album, it probably took me six or seven months until I could see how the songs came together with all the parts. It took awhile to make sense of it, which I'm sure is true of anybody who listens to the album for the first time. From a performance aspect, because we play the songs live, a lot of us had to learn parts we didn't know existed on the album. You listen to the album, even if you're part of the band recording it, and you hear the parts that someone else records. But unless you're the kind of guy who has to learn the parts to his favorite band's music, maybe you're not thinking about 'What are the notes they're doing there?' So when it comes time to perform, we have to rearrange it to play live. It takes on a whole different level performance-wise.

**Having a five song, fifty minute album, that's a lot to take in on every single song. Why can't you guys ever just do something easy?**

TD: Sometimes I listen to STEREO LAB and I think I would love to be in a band like that. I think that'd be great! I'd have a lot of fun doing it. With the stuff

we've been doing, it's hard to balance a normal lifestyle and doing music. Since we have to pay rent and go to work and that kind of thing, and it takes such a long time to do a record, we have to commit to something before we do it. It's not that I wouldn't like to do something easy, it's just not my number one priority.

GM: There's just so many things you can do with your time. If you have an idea of something you want to pursue, you go after it. It would be nice to do something easy, but I think the music we're making now is a statement we want to make as artists. For us, it just happens to be very long. We're a band of great length.

TD: I think about my future as a musician and the fact that I want to keep doing this for awhile. By doing what you do, you not only do it because you love it, but because you could be aware the personality or the path that you're forging for yourself. With our stuff, just the path that we chose is to start off doing the experimental stuff. Maybe we'll do easier stuff later... I don't want to undermine the fact that we love doing it, because it is genuine, but also I'm aware that we now have this reputation of doing weird stuff. Later on, where are we going to end up as musicians? The people who will be interested in working with us are going to look at our reputation for doing innovative stuff, or weird stuff. It's a lot different than later on in someone looks at the library of things that you've done. "Oh, you've done a bunch of pop, a bunch of bar rock, that's cool, so no, I'm not going to let you do the score for my film." You know what I mean? With us, we're doing this innovative stuff so maybe some filmmaker will say, "I've got this film, it's kind of weird, I think you should do the music for it."

**Obviously with your studies you're thinking of music in a much different way than I am, but how do you decide quality on stuff, that at least to me, is hard to understand the form of?**

TD: There's a lot of doubt about it. It moves me! I like it, but it's really hard to get into the discussion of objective quality of art. I don't know if there is objective quality of art. Do you think there is?

**It really depends on what the art is. It's not until an art form is standardized that you can really go back and pick the good from the bad. When it's new, it's out in space by itself.**

TD: I don't know! But I like it! I like listening to it and I like playing. But I have no idea if it's good. Some people hate it. So it's not good to them. A lot of people say it's pretentious. And these are people who don't know what the word pretentious means. The word pretentious is really misused as far as music goes. They use it to describe things they don't get. What they're really saying is, "This is too smart for me." Are you going to want to be the guy to say, "This isn't dumb enough for me!" I don't want to be that guy! You read on the internet where people say they hate the name KAYO DOT and they think the music is pretentious. Everywhere I've read this has been on the heavy metal forums, even though it does hurt me in a little bit of a way since I'm emotional about the music, it reminds me that we made the right decision in wanting to branch out. We kind of expected that to happen. People were going to say the name was 'gay'. Of course! That's what metal people do!

**Have you yet seen an educated and structured critique of your music?**

TD: I've seen some pretty smart ones. I just don't think anybody understands it the way we understand it.

GM: It goes back to who's doing the review. A lot of the reviews we've had have not come from an uppity music critic. Maybe being on Tzadik, we might get the attention of more high brow music critics who will approach reviewing the music in more of a scholarly way. The reviews we've gotten have come from people who approach it in more of an emotional way, which is kind of the way I look at music anyway. I don't really review what I think is good or bad based on analyzing the music and tearing it apart and looking at each little detail. I look at the overall sense of what works, what didn't, what moved me. A lot of the reviewers in the metal and prog rock oriented magazines really approach it in that way. I don't think I've ever seen a detailed, analytical review of the music.

TD: I've seen analytical reviews, but they're usually pretty wrong. They'll call a trumpet a clarinet, and they'll say there's jazz when there's no jazz. But I'd like to have an analytical review, the same way I'd like to go to a psychiatrist to find out what my dysfunctions were. I'm just curious.

**I've been unsuccessful in trying to describe your music, as opposed to just describing my reaction to you guys. It makes me realize the separation between me as a listener and me as a writer. I can't figure out your form!**

TD: With KAYO DOT, it's supposed to be contemporary classical music. We listen to it as metal because we all listen to metal, except I would like people to think of it as a classical music record. What we're doing is helping the electric guitar and drum kit and electric bass to become part of the lexicon of modern classical music. If you listen to classical music you'll find that the form of a lot of it is not repetitious. The way that a metal song will have an A section, a B section, and a C section, or it'll have a riff that you can repeat a few times. In general, classical music is more linear. It starts somewhere, keeps going, and ends somewhere. It's not a cut and paste kind of thing where you have sections that you can hit repeat on. In composing this music, we kind of did it with classical music in mind as far as the form goes. If you're trying to understand it from a heavy metal perspective, it's going to come off as confusing. Just think of it as contemporary classical music with distorted guitars and drums.

**Now people are going to be saying, "This is like that thing Yngwie did in Japan."**

GM: Oh god!

TD: That's not what I mean!

GM: Don't mention that.

**As soon as you say something like classical, it's going to put assumptions into people's heads that you have to disprove. Certainly it's a million miles away from anything that's appeared on an Yngwie album!**

GM: Let me set this straight for you right now. If you use the harmonic minor scale to shred and solo over a power chord, you are not playing classical music. That's what they call neoclassical. Just because you use the scales that Bach tended to utilize does not make you classical!

**Is it really challenging to write songs like this, or is it just time consuming to make sure you get it right?**

TD: These were harder to write, and harder to arrange than anything we've ever done. With this stuff, we thought about it a lot. Before, we called it astral metal because we wanted to remove the human element from it. This time, it's really very human. We had to think about everything that we were doing and nothing happened by itself. People think KAYO DOT is MAUDLIN OF THE WELL, and it's not. It's a different band.

**Where do the lyrics fit into your grand scheme of things?**

TD: Byron, who did the lyrics for MAUDLIN OF THE WELL, did the lyrics for this project too. In my opinion, Byron is the best lyricist that I've ever met. I love his writing. Everybody in the band loves his writing. You like it, right, Greg?

GM: I love it.

TD: Byron's our friend. We see him all the time. We wanted him to participate, and he wanted to participate except he's not into the performance aspect of it. We let him do what he wanted to do. But I couldn't tell you why certain lyrics were important for certain songs. That would be a question for him. The lyrics are totally his thing.

GM: I thought he wrote them totally independently of the music?

TD: Did he? I don't know how he did it. He had lyrics.

**The vocals don't sound out of place. If the lyrics were written independently, how is it that the vocals flow right with the music?**

TD: Byron are really good at working together as far as music and lyrics go. He'll give me lyrics, he'll listen to a song and he'll think of which lyrics should go with it. I think he's pretty good at deciding what's going to work in what song. When he gives it back to me, I'll fit them in, and decide the timing and the place. Sometimes, there are lines that he's written that we don't sing. In Marathon, the lyrics are twice as long as what we say in the song. Occasionally there are a few lines that I leave out depending how it fits with the music. Or we'll think of creative ways to get it in there. Like in The Antique for example, there's the sound of an antique Polaroid. What that sound is, there's a stanza of lyrics that wouldn't really fit in and we took a photograph of that stanza of lyrics and we put the sound in. So the camera is saying those lines. The sound that we picked, and we did several takes, was the one that looked the best, not what sounded the best. We wanted to use the one that was most legible and then put the sound of it in.

**How the hell do you do this live?**

GM: Very carefully. It's just a matter of just trying to work with what we have. We don't have the orchestral players that we do on the CD. Just a matter of rearranging, refining, finding out which parts are necessary to the songs, basically finding what the song can live without. It's just like rethinking music you've already written.

TD: And a few people in our band can play a couple of instruments too, so we can trade off. And we have a sound guy now. He knows what effects I need and how

to mix things right. Before we always had to rely on the club's sound guy and it was already a mess.

**Who these days would you consider your musical peers?**

GM: I wouldn't even know where to begin with something like that. My musical tastes are not as varied as Toby is.

TD: My musical peers are my friend. My friend Sky Cooper is my musical peer. Greg is my musical peer. I'm not even going to be as bold as to say that anybody on Tzadick is our musical peer. On Dark Symphonies, I would say the other bands there were our peers. But on Tzadik, they're so good, I could never even have the audacity to say anybody on that label were our musical peers. I'm confident in the people that I know that are buddies of mine are my musical peers. I don't know really what I can say beyond that. Saying you're somebody's peer means you're equal with them. I definitely don't feel equal to the other artists on Tzadik, they're much better than we are.

GM: When I think of musical peers, I think in terms of people that you know, or people who you have worked with. I would say just based on bands that we've played with, our peers would be a band like DYSRHYTHMIA. They, to me, are a band trying to do something really new and inventive. They're a band that's very passionate about what they do, and they are focused. In those terms, that would be one band I would call a musical peer.

TD: Bands like that, BEHOLD THE ARCTOPUS, TIME OF ORCHIDS. This crowd of friends that are in really interesting bands trying to do the same shit and are at the same level of well-knownness. I know you were asking who do we sound like, but I think the best way to answer that question is to mention these bands that are doing their own things. There are parts of our record that sound like something ESOTERIC would do, parts that sound like something Björk would do, some of the vocals sound like Jeff Buckley, some of the radio effects sound like something RADIOHEAD would do.

**You mentioned BEHOLD THE ARCTOPUS, so maybe you know. Is an Imperial Attack Spaceturtle anything like Gamera or not?**

TD: I would guess yes but I didn't ask them about that.

**Have you heard SLEEPYTMR GORILLA MUSEUM?**

TD: Their violinist released an album on Tzadik. Carla Kihlstedt. Her record is really good. I have heard SLEEPYTIME GORILLA MUSEUM. I think they're good except I don't like the guy who does the tough guy vocals. I don't dislike him as a person, I'm just not fond of his style of vocals. I think their music is really cool.

**What five albums have each of you been listening to lately?**

GM: I've been listening to the BLIND GUARDIAN *Live* album.

TD: I've been listening mostly to BLONDE REDHEADS, the album *Melody of Certain Damaged Lemons*, and also to KHANATE's new album *Things Viral*, and a two disc Gyorgy Ligeti album called *Amosphères* and *Lux aeterna*. And our album. I listen to our album a lot. I've also been listening to *Songs in the Key of Z*. It's this collection of songs by people who are crazy or mentally retarded. Very eccentric in some

way, usually not very good at their instruments. Somebody made a compilation with all this weird stuff.

GM: Now I know what I've been listening to. I was listening to that Iron Maiden live album from the Number of the Beast tour that came in the box. I've been spinning the Chroma Key album at least once a week for the last year and a half. And King Diamond, I just bought Them and Conspiracy. And Threshold, Critical Mass.

#### **Discography**

With MAUDLIN OF THE WELL

*My Fruit Psychobells... A Seed Combustible* (1999  
Dark Symphonies)

*Bath* (2001 Dark Symphonies)

*Leaving Your Body Map* (2001 Dark Symphonies)

With KAYO DOT

*Choirs of the Eye* (2003 Tzadik)

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## Feature Interview



*Power metal and Christian metal. Isn't that an odd combination to see lined up for an LotFP interview? Nah. Power metal can be the worst shit out there... but there are extraordinary examples that validate the entire style. I'm not Christian and overly preacher buggers annoy me to no end... but there are Christian bands worth listening to, even if you're a non-Christian, just like there are Satanic bands that are worth listening to if you're not Satanic. I could go on about why it is that the only people that understand that are the people who don't care about lyrics at all, but that would be off the topic of THEOCRACY. Fact is this is a one man band that takes the melodic power metal form and makes an album that's got variety and true songwriting pizzazz. That's all I ask. He does it one better by putting in some great melodic sensibilities, and some asskicking, clever instrumental work. Throw this into the SONATA ARCTICA category... I just love great melodies attached to a metal song, and as a bonus the guy actually knows English so his lyrics aren't ass. Here is Mr. THEOCRACY himself, Matt Smith, to suffer the interrogation...*

**I had no idea you were in Georgia.**

I'm right outside of Athens, about an hour, hour and a half away from you, probably.

**I've only been out to Athens a few times, to go see shows at the Lunch Paper.**

Really? I've been to a couple there.

**It's probably the worst place ever to see a metal show.**

Nothing to write home about, that's for sure. I remember seeing this one kid, he was a one man band, he was sitting on a stool playing guitar, screaming into a mic, he had a kick drum on one foot and a snare on the other foot, and was basically just making a terrible racket.

**Ah, the good old Athens heavy metal music scene. Does that explain why you don't have any band members?**

Probably. I definitely stick out like a sort thumb in this town. It's kind of annoying, especially since Athens bills itself as a music town because we have REM and the B52s. I've seen a few heavy bands around here, it's not even second rate stuff, it's more like fourth or fifth. I'm sure there's some talented bands kicking around, but it's a rarity. We've got a lot of singer-songwriter acoustic type stuff.

**I guess I should ask the boring questions since you are new to the scene here. Who are you, and how did you get to the point that you're releasing your own album?**

I'm Matt Smith, I'm twenty-six, from Athens. This has actually been a long time coming for me, not as sudden as it probably seems. There was a time when I actually did have band members. I guess it would be accurate to say I had a band member. This kid, Richard, was one of my best friends growing up, and he was a bass player. I played guitar and he played bass and we'd jam together. We'd write some little songs and this and that. This was probably '96, '97ish. Nothing too serious, but I kept writing, kept writing. Eventually he moved and went to college, and I've had SPINAL TAP luck with drummers. The first drummer I had was this guy named Isaac, and I honestly have no idea what happened to him. One day, he says he's going to Atlanta to find a job, and I didn't hear from him for months and months. I called where he used to live, talked to his old roommates, and they're like, "You know what? I really have no idea where he is!" Ever since that time, it's been just me. I did a couple little demos here and there. Fast forward to the year 2002, last year, Deron Blevins from Metal Ages heard one or two songs I'd done. He liked the stuff, he was looking at working with some distribution, so he talked to me online, told me who he was, and volunteered to help release whatever I did next. At some point, I let him hear a couple things I was working on for this album and he really, really liked the stuff. He'd been thinking of starting his own label, we talked for awhile, and we released this album as his first signing. It took a lot of time to do, so a couple other albums actually came out before mine did. That's pretty much where we are.

**How did you develop into this style? It's definitely a European style.**

I just picked all the elements I enjoyed. When I first started writing stuff, I had a lot more thrash elements. It's not like it's mindblowingly original, but I like the unorthodox arrangements of prog, I like the energy and the melodies of European power metal, some of the energy of thrash.

**How do you, as one person, manage to come up with more good ideas than many European power metal bands that have five or six members?**

I appreciate that. I think I have a pretty good filter, as weird as that sounds. When I write, there's a kazillion

parts kicking around everywhere. I'll have melodies that I sing into recorders, just a ton of loose parts. Over the time of living with these parts, you just get a feel for what's strong and what's not. At least for me, over time, once I get some lyrical ideas, some parts will gravitate towards each other and that's when I really get the idea for a song. I can tell right off if something is going to work. I spend a lot of time writing. If something doesn't make me excited or really get me going, I'm not going waste the time by putting it into a song! There's not a huge difference of style from track to track but for the most part every song does something different than the one before it. There's a little more variation than you usually get with the two hundred BPM double bass European bands.

**Had you gotten any other nibbles from labels aside from Metal Ages?**

When I started working on the demos that became this album, my plan was to sent it out to a bunch of labels, but it never got that far since Deron intercepted things. The first little demo or two that I did back in the day, I had sent that out and either never heard anything or got rejected. At the time I was like, "How could they reject this? It's so great!" I go back and listen to it today and it's pure crap! But this time there was nothing else.

**Why the name THEOCRACY?**

If you read the lyrics, there's a lot of Christian-based stuff in there. I spent forever trying to find a decent name. I thought about that one day, it had more personal meaning to me than the normal political meaning people would think of immediately. I just liked it. I thought it had a nice sound to it, it sounded powerful, and it fit the tone of the music for me.

**Theocracy basically means ruling by religion, which is pretty much the opposite of what most of the metal world wants. What are your thoughts on the Christian metal scene?**

To be completely honest, I've heard very few bands that have ever impressed me. That was one of the reasons I wanted to do this. Most of everything that I've ever heard in the Christian metal scene, and a lot of this probably has to do with my lack of going out and hearing new bands, almost all the bands I've heard have sounded really derivative. Again, I'm not a bastion of originality but everyone I've heard has been just like, "They're trying to be just like SEVENDUST!" and they come out with a third or fourth rate version of it. I wanted to do something of a lot higher quality, and do something in this style. The vast majority of what I've heard in the Christian scene is death metal or hardcore. There just wasn't any progressive or power stuff that I heard. I still haven't heard a whole lot. I don't know if my head is just in the sand or what! The last actual show we played was an all-day kind of show with a whole bunch of other Christian bands and every other band was a hardcore band. Everything went fine, but we ended up sticking out like a sore thumb.

**It's been about six months since you've completed the album. Which would you consider the best songs on the album?**

It sounds like such a cliché, it really does change around a lot. If you forced me at gunpoint to say, I'd probably say Twist of Fate, the last track, the dark intensity of it. I like the title track a lot. The title track was actually the very last one written. I knew that as soon as people

heard the name, they would say, "Oh, he just wants to take over the world and force people to religion," and this and that. It has nothing to do with it so I wanted to address a little more what it meant to me on a personal note. And Serpent's Kiss I would say.

**It's Serpent's Kiss for me, and the title track. Serpent's Kiss is one of those long songs that doesn't seem long. And that instrumental section, it's nice and good.**

After years of writing songs, you kind of get past the idea that every idea is good. Like I said before, it's that filter thing. You learn how to shorten sections up and take things out. I was a little nervous about that instrumental section because I thought it was cool, but I was worried that other people might think it was long and boring. But the reaction has actually been pretty positive.

**That song reminds me of the big IRON MAIDEN epics.**

Yeah, they're my biggest writing influence.

**The song itself has bits of IRON MAIDEN influence, but it doesn't announce itself as an IRON MAIDEN rip-off. It just hits where it's moving well.**

I learned a lot from Steve Harris in terms of pacing and melodic structure.

**And the thing for me about the title track is this perfect, catchy chorus.**

A lot of people latch onto the chorus of that one. The chorus of the title track is probably the first section of that that I wrote. That just popped into my head in the parking lot at work or some crazy thing.

**This is a pretty long album. Sixty-eight and a half minutes. Why so long of an album?**

That wasn't the plan. I planned to make it around an hour, then the whole title track came into being and I threw that idea out the window. It's just how it ended up. I very easily could have filled up seventy-four minutes. More and more I'm thinking right around an hour is the ideal length. I think a lot of people feel like that. There are a lot of great albums that are long, but it's also the reason for a lot of B-rate material that a lot of bands are putting out. You look at all the classic albums and they had eight songs and were fifty minutes or whatever. Now it's like you have bands putting out so much more music and I think stuff gets sacrificed. The next album I do will hopefully be around an hour.

**Seems to me people are pressured to fill up the recording capacity of their recording medium. It's going to scary when the next technology can fit four hours on it. "I feel ripped off, this album is only two and a half hours long! What have they been doing the past two years?"**

It can go either way. If you put out a full CD's worth of material and it's all really strong, that's one thing, at the same time I think, depending on the breakdown of the songs, it's a little harder to digest. After a certain point it gets predictable.

**I've always thought the perfect length for an album was forty, forty-five minutes. It's a good length listen, and you're left wanting more. You want to listen to it again. A lot of bands when they hit the sixty, seventy minute mark, you wonder if it's ever going to end. It's an endurance test. So, when writing these songs... you've got three songs over eleven minutes, you've got a handful in the four to**

**six minute mark. How do you decide when a song is going to be short and when one is going to go long? How do you know when to end a song?**

By the time I've gotten to that thought process, I've already attached the musical ideas to some lyrical ideas. That's when I see the big picture. Up until then it's haphazard. I can just tell. Sometimes depending on the subject matter or what I'm writing about, I might know I want to say this or this, or wrap it up in this way. That's really the best way I know how to answer.

**Will Theocracy always have religious themes going into the future?**

I would say that it always will. That's kind of the idea, and what's most important to me. I might do other projects here and there, but as far as I'm concerned, the idea will probably be pretty similar.

**The 'File Under Metal' thing on the back, was that yours or Deron's idea? It's always funny to me when CDs actually have the filing suggestions.**

That was all Deron!

**Obviously, in the current metal scene, power metal must take up lots of your time, but what other things do you like to listen to?**

Prog bands here and there. Classic bands like MAIDEN and MEGADETH. A lot of movie soundtracks, I actually like James Horner. One thing I'm getting into more and more, right in the middle of Twist of Fate on the album is an orchestral section. A pretty intense score going on behind the heavy guitars. It's one of my favorite parts of the album, if not the favorite part of the album. I really enjoy that kind of thing. I'm trying to learn a little bit more about it. Lately, I've gotten into some regular progressive rock here and there, which is something I've never done before.

**Most one man bands have their main instrument, and everything else just plays support to that main instrument. Some of the ideas with the keyboards, it's actual enhancements to the songs, it's bringing in new sounds. It's not just this keyboard sound that's supporting a melody. You seem to really know how to play that stuff!**

I'm really not a good keyboardist at all. I wanted to, when I first started, play rhythm guitar, the whole Hetfield, Mustaine thing. Nowadays, once I do find band members, I'm more interested in being the frontman. It's just what I enjoy more. It just dawned on me one day, it's not really that much fun to play and sing at the same time. It's fun, it's just a lot of work. You have to concentrate really hard. I hope to be able to just concentrate on the vocals. As far as the keyboards, I like them because it enhances things. I hate keyboard solos. I can't stand keyboard solos. To me, they don't add anything. In terms of lead guitar, I like good guitar playing but I've never been big on the guitar hero type.

**Well you do a good enough job to where the songs sound good. As far as the songwriting, I would imagine when writing a song you change your mind a lot about things. You have new ideas between the time you start and when you're adding all the layers, but it's not like you can jam with someone else to know how they're going to sound right away.**

Putting the layers on is actually the most fun part. When you've already done the basic tracks, I know I want to add something with keyboards or acoustic guitars, harmonies or whatever. I know kind of what I want it to

sound like but I haven't actually composed the part. You get in there and fool around and adding stuff. It's probably the kind of thing you have to be careful about, you can add and add and add, especially when it's just one guy doing everything. When I did this album, the recording medium I used, even though it was a digital medium, it wasn't very edit-friendly, so I wanted to have everything decided on how it was going to be before laying down the tracks. It took so long to make this record, by the time I got around to laying down the tracks I had demoed this album a gazillion times. There's a lot of tweaking that goes on but it winds up being the most fun part.

**If you've learned to play all the other instruments enough to lay down an album, how come you didn't learn the drums?**

I can play drums, but I can't play drums very good. I can play your standard one hundred twenty beats a minute 4/4 rock song, but when it comes to playing a lot of the real fast stuff, I wouldn't have a chance. Strange enough, drums are probably the thing I enjoy playing the most. I've never actually owned my own drum kit.

**What five albums have you been listening to lately?**

John Arch's *Twist of Fate*. I was a big fan of *Awaken the Guardian*, this was quite different, but I just think it's really solid. I wrote the review for that album that you'll find on DREAM THEATER's website. Neal Morse's new one, Spock's Beard's *Snow* I've been enjoying a lot. SONATA ARCTICA's *Winterheart's Guild*. DREAM THEATER's *Train of Thought*. Those are the main ones I've been listening to lately.

**Any final words for the readers?**

Thanks for your interest in the quote-unquote band. Thanks for supporting the album. I hope to be able to put an official band together, go out of tour and play some of this stuff live. That's one of my big goals and dreams. I actually have been contacted by people all over. Sometimes it's scary. Someone from California said, "I'm ready to move there now, what's the job market like in Athens?" That's about it, I think.

#### Discography

*Theocracy* (2003 Metal Ages)

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### Album Reviews



ADAMANTER *The Shadow Mirror*

11- 41:34 Black Lotus

Power metal.

When the label in their promotional material calls the production of the CD they're trying to hype "average", you know you can mentally translate that as "sounds like catshit that even a dog wouldn't eat." The band plays around with production tricks like panning the vocals around in the first song when on the whole the album is pretty dank sounding. Weird priorities there.

The vocals and solos are so much louder and clearer than everything else and the clarity of various instruments seems to waver between songs. I've heard rehearsal demos that sound better. It just all sounds very careless (and they get their own website wrong in the booklet).

As for the material, there's really nothing interesting going on. Italian power metal with plenty of piano and keyboards, and the vocal melodies aren't so interesting at all, which is the final nail in the coffin for the album considering it's the only thing that's consistently clear in the mix. Can't fault the soloists (both guitar and keyboard) for playing ability, but there really isn't a place for a band with uninteresting songs with garbage audio quality.

www.adamanter.net



ASMEGIN *Hin Vordende Sod & Sö*

11- 42:20 Napalm

Folk metal.

I don't think I've ever heard an album that is quite as adventurous while staying within the folk/Viking metal style. ASMEGIN really puts it together so it's not quite so predictable as the latest MOONSORROW (which I see getting loads of praise for reasons unknown) but it doesn't escape the genre completely. In fact, with all of the albums that popped up after STORM set a standard for combining folk and metal, this has to be the absolute best album of the style to be heard so far.

They throw everything but the kitchen sink out at you to get it done. Female, male clean (by SOLEFALD's Lars Nedland), and male growled vocals, fiddle, flute, zither, it's all here. Kind of like OTYG if Vintersorg was as experimental there as he is these days with his own band.

The genius of the band really isn't the presence of a variety of elements, but rather the manner in which they're used. The backbone of every song is a simple, bouncy guitar riff. Everything revolves around that skeleton, so even when they go a little wild with all three vocalists singing different lines over each other (always a favorite around the LotFP offices), it doesn't become too difficult to enjoy on a simple level. The album really isn't too deep musically, but it knows how to take a good idea and dress it up in enough ways that boredom never sets in.

Thumbs way up.

www.asmegin.com



BLIND GUARDIAN *Live*

22- 134:05 Century Media/Virgin

Power metal.

One of the world's best and brightest metal bands (and best power metal band by several large strides) have put

out their second live album, a nice two CD set. What's even better about it is because of the way the studio CDs are produced and performed, there is a good amount of difference between the sound of the songs there and here. The band has taken to a course of bigger and more intricate productions, which makes them perhaps the only truly successful band in metal that continues to innovate and push the envelope after they become successful. The downside to that is that a lot of metal fans, especially^2 power metal fans, want things more direct and straightforward. *Live* creates a balance between the more cultured metal fan curious to how they can pull off the layered material with only six musicians on stage, and the brainless dolts who gave up on the later albums because they got lost when they realized there's more to hear than what they caught on first listen. And thus the age of the run-on sentence continues.

The songs come across more direct for the newer material. On older songs, the production's sharper and more powerful just because it's 2003 instead of 1991 and the band's got major label money behind them and seems like they didn't want to release a turd, or a no-effort contract filler. But let me tell you how weird it is reading a foreign magazine (OK, not really reading, but looking at the pictures and album review scores...) and seeing Virgin Records ads with AMORPHIS and BLIND GUARDIAN side by side. It was weird. Thanks for letting me tell you.

My only true complaint for the album is that the crowd is turned way down compared to *Tokyo Tales*. The crowd was allowed to be super-loud there, and it's so cool for the sing-along bits. Who isn't bowled over during that performance of Goodbye My Friend hearing the crowd screaming back at the band? One of the important points of a BLIND GUARDIAN concert is that the songs themselves are an interactive experience (as opposed to stopping the song and doing a "Let me hear you!" routine) and with just a couple of exceptions, that isn't captured too well here.

Here's the distribution of how many songs were taken off of which album: *Battalions of Fear* 1, *Follow the Blind* 1, *Tales From the Twilight World* 2, *Somewhere Far Beyond* 2, *Imaginations From the Other Side* 7, *Nightfall in Middle-Earth* 5 (including intro track), *A Night at the Opera* 4. Considering their first live album came out between *Somewhere Far Beyond* and *Imaginations*, this is excellent allocation, with the very minor complaint that the pre-*Imaginations* songs shouldn't have already been on *Tokyo Tales*, and every single one was. I'd have liked to hear Don't Break the Circle and the Somewhere Far Beyond title track at least. Minor quibbles though, as they hit the important *Imaginations* stuff, but When Sorrow Sang would have been great instead of the argh Nightfall (I hate that one and Bard's Song just because they aren't songs with good sing-along potential, but rather they're "We're taking a break so you can sing along" songs, and they just irk me), and a live version of And Then There Was Silence would have been awesome, just to hear them pull it off in a stripped down version, and sacrificing some of those earlier songs wouldn't have been so bad considering they've already been on a live album by the band.

I must note that I have heard Valhalla in person, on album, on the previous live album, and on numerous bootlegs... and the version here destroys any other version I've heard. It's one of metal's greatest songs and here it gives goosebumps.

This band is great. Their albums are great. Their live albums are great. Bet you can't say that about too many bands. Support, buy, enjoy, worship.

... and after several more weeks of absorption, I am fully convinced that this is one of the greatest live albums ever. Absolutely incredible and it ruins a lot of the studio versions of these songs for me because it's just that damned good.

[www.blindguardian.com](http://www.blindguardian.com)



BLINDED COLONY *Divine*  
9- 36:41 Scarlet

Newfangled Gothenburgian metal.

I almost want to pat myself on the back, because I had these guys tagged as Swedish just by the sound of the band and the photo on the back of the CD. Then I go to the website and find that I'm right! Points off for the band right there to have so obvious a sound that I can guess where in the whole wide world they're from after one song. The idea of the band is taking newer IN FLAMES, mixing it up a bit with old IN FLAMES style, and they just heard that MERCENARY album before they hit the studio. I can hear where they could hit an audience but their execution brands them as followers, not leaders.

Heavy emphasis on the chugging riffs, with some lead guitar work over it, and a singer who can't seem to tell whether he's a harsh clean singer or a clear growler kind of guy. All of the songs are of a very similar pacing, not too fast, not too slow, and the more I listen to it, the more everything sounds the same. Their riffs, lead flourishes, vocal patterns, and arrangements are very similar from song to song, leaving them with nothing that stands out. Write for songs, guys, not your sound, or you're MORTICIAN 2003.

Truth be told, the album's not horrible or anything, but on the scale of 'Damn that record company for sending this to me' to 'I need to buy me a full version of this and get them on the phone and put them on the cover', *Divine* sits comfortably at 'Well that wasn't too annoying.'

As an ending note, don't mean to be hairist or anything, but if there are five guys in a metal band, shouldn't one of them manage to not have very short or shaved hair?

[www.blindedcolony.com](http://www.blindedcolony.com)



BROKEN ARROW *Abyss of Darkness*  
9- 42:23 Scarlet

Metal.

Crashed submarines, dead aquanauts, and bare-titted mermaids giving hummers to conches. If you were

going to release a debut album, which of these items would you want on your album cover? If you said all of them, you just might like BROKEN ARROW. Not that I know what this underwater scene has to do with the title track (or any other track), or how any of this makes sense to the band name BROKEN ARROW. Most bands don't provoke such thoughts, but when you have such an outlandish cover, a band name shared by a John Travolta/Christian Slater movie, and songs like Stalingrad and The Gothic Line, people are going to wonder if you have any clue what the fuck you're doing.

I swore if the album started off with a speedy double bass song, I was just throwing the CD away. It did not. In fact, the entire album stays away from the usual power metal clichés (save for Stalingrad and Isaac's Story), if you don't count the high vocals the vocalist often uses. Not to say this is a worthy investment, because the album's still boring as hell. It depends on a lot of 1980s hard rock/heavy metal hooks, staying in a mid-pace pretty much the whole time. There are plenty of points where the album could be decent, but it fails. There's an attempt at a pretty mean main riff in Invisible Heroes, but the singer is ill-suited to more aggressive vocals, the chorus goes completely weak, and the entire thing keeps getting punctuated with the riff being played on really cheap sounding keyboards. This must be what it's like trying to think after a lobotomy, put into audio form. In fact, the idea of the music changing between more of a crunch versus more of a wimpy metal style is all over here. It's not as night-and-day as, say, Ophethian switches, but it's hardly subtle as it seems this guy really has to concentrate in order to stop sounding like Fabio Leone and put some grit into his voice. And even when he's using his more natural sounding, clear voice, it's ill-fitting. There's no attitude, no go-n-get-em. It's an emotionless, clinical performance. I think this band has a keyboard player just because these bands are 'supposed' to have keyboard players. I can't think of a single keyboard sound on this album that was necessary, or that didn't pull the song in question down. The album's as poorly planned as the cover art, frankly.

I've seen this referenced as some sort of QUEENSRÛCHE/RAINBOW hybrid, which technically maybe isn't wrong, but somebody's ignoring little things like talent to say Broken Arrow fits in there. Make some melodic metal with slower hard rock characteristics and suddenly people can't tell the difference between Blackmore and the next widget from the Italian Guitarist Factory.

On the plus side, if they ditch this singer, they are professional enough that if they keep it up, the law of averages states that they could find a noteworthy song or two showing up on the next couple of albums. These guys need a re-think, top to bottom.



CONSPIRACY *The Unknown*  
9- 53:38 Inside Out

Rock. This is the second album from the project of the duo of Chris Squire (founding member and

bassist/voice of YES) and Billy Sherwood (a later member). Two members, combined age of ninety-three. I know some of you will be scared off by the mention of YES, but when it comes to 70s prog rock, 1974's *Tales From Topographic Oceans* with its average song length of twenty minutes (!) doesn't have very many rivals, and *Relayer* from that same year is massive as well.. I think that while *The Unknown* is a very smartly written rock album, it's not progressive enough, adventurous enough (shame that the term is no longer synonymous with progressive) and certainly not edgy enough, to really fit into a must-buy category, but certainly isn't embarrassing for the musicians on any level. Hard to say anything against it but at the same time can't say I'll ever listen to it again, but here it is if there are big fans of these musicians out there....

<http://conspiracymusic.net/>



CRADLE OF FILTH *Damnation and a Day*  
17- 76:55 Sony

Theatrical black metal.

Six months after its release, I really don't have much to say about this album. There are only two real songs to give a shit about here, Carrion and Babalon AD, and neither should get on the band's 'best of' album in ten years. The band hasn't given us more than two songs worth hearing in the past five years, so my first instinct is to say fuck them, in the ass, with a gilded and spiked scepter.

But there are forces at work here other than their present sorry state of songwriting.

CRADLE OF FILTH have released an uncompromising CRADLE OF FILTH album on a major label. Repeat after me. Major label, no watering down. Repeat after me, Billboard ranking: #140.

Buy this album, and buy it often, and maybe that will send a message to the major labels that they can sign more bands with a melodic and non-streetcore edge, let them be themselves, and they will be at least moderately successful. It would be cool to have our favorite bands raped by giant labels instead of smaller ones, because then they'd actually get decent record budgets, road crews, and a real flash of popularity instead of the barely visible cult followings many of the 'big' metal bands have now. It's all fleeting and it all ends in oblivion anyway, but let's push the current mainstream crap out and install our own crap instead.

Or maybe I should just go with that first instinct and listen to my copies of *Vempire* and *Dusk and Her Embrace*, when this band really was on the cutting edge of their sound and delivering the world class songs as well.

[www.cradleoffilth.com](http://www.cradleoffilth.com)

# DIABOLIC

DIABOLIC *Infinity Through Purification*  
8- 39:37 Olympic

Death metal.

Can they play fast? Really fast? Yes. Can the dude growl? Sure! Is it... heavy? You betcha! Is there any depth to this? Well, they can play fast, anyway. And they do. All the time. Check out this tidbit the label attempts to push on us: "Their new effort, *Infinity Through Purification*, is a blistering eight track offering that pushes the musical boundaries beyond what was previously thought humanly possible." Methinks this record label liar has... A- only heard *At War With Satan* and *Seven Churches*, and therefore is ignorant but telling the truth as they naively perceive it, B- Has a bet going with their officemates to see if any publication lifts that line for their review (and no, my quotation doesn't count), or C- Is lying to us and thinks we're all fools. I'm sure there's plenty of things I believe that simply aren't true, but I'm not so slow as to mistake a completely status quo extreme death metal band as having anything to do with pushing boundaries. If this thing is beyond what's previously thought humanly possible, what the hell are the NASUM albums, products of extraterrestrials?

And I know Neil Kernon's got problems where he can't leave the US for fear of not being able to get back in. But god damn it, are the only US bands that labels want to invest in these awful, one dimensional death metal bands? Band after band of not-worth-a-shit, been-there-done-that-well-over-ten-years-ago-now pummeling death metal is getting top notch production. I know he likes the stuff, but a guy who has produced million-selling albums should not be working with fucking DIABOLIC. Check out the MORBID ANGEL rant for why this is happening though.

DIABOLIC, creators of very good sounding, boring as shit generic death metal. Let me pick my ass with joy.

[www.diabolicblastmasters.com](http://www.diabolicblastmasters.com)



DIVINE RAPTURE *The Burning Passion*  
11- 39:40 Listenable

Death metal.

Blast beats like vicodin spam. Really guys, if you're going to put all of your songs on top of that Sandovalish drumming, your drums shouldn't sound like shit. And I don't believe for a single second that anyone was actually playing those bass drums. No way. It sounds like someone put a microphone on an electric typewriter and just held a key down. Throw in a handful of MORBID ANGEL wanna-be riffs, some guttural NYC

styled death metal, and some admittedly odd guitar solos, and you've got DIVINE RAPTURE.

Needless to say (and needles in my ear), the vocalist doesn't win any awards for intelligibility or memorability. I'm almost tempted to get on the phone and interview these guys just to ask the question, "Why does your band have a vocalist?" There might be some comedy in that answer. Grumph grph grph rar rar rar. Sorry to turn into everyone's grandpa with this "You can't even understand them" kind of stuff, but think about a couple things. What is the purpose of vocals? What is the point of extreme vocals? No answer I can come up with for either of those questions explains what I'm hearing on this album.

But I think I should contact these guys about doing interview transcriptions for me. Sounds like they could get them done very quickly.

[www.divinerapture.net](http://www.divinerapture.net)



EDGE OF SANITY *Crimson II*  
44- 43:02 Black Mark

Death metal.

It's the sequel to one of the best and coolest metal albums ever, 1996's *Crimson*. It was an album that was discussed in the business office before the music was written. For these two reasons, I was quite skeptical about how the album was going to turn out.

This is more of a Dan Swanö solo album than an EDGE OF SANITY album, but as he put it, the rest of the guys did an EDGE OF SANITY album without him, so it's his turn to make one without them. He performs everything except two of the growling voices (Roger Johansson of INSISION and Jonas Granvik of WITHOUT GRIEF) and lead guitars (Simon Johansson of MEMORY GARDEN fame and Mike Wead of MERCYFUL FATE and every Swedish classic doom metal band ever).

Before even getting into a description of what the album is, I have to be honest as to what it isn't. It isn't *Crimson*. I could even say that it isn't even close. Dan likes to say that EDGE OF SANITY wasn't working at the end because the band had different ideas of where to go. The rest of the guys had a more brutal thing in mind, Dan had more melody in mind. I declare that when EDGE OF SANITY was working at its best, it was because this conflict within the band resulted in some wild compromises to include both, and that's how we got things like *Purgatory Afterglow* and *Crimson*. When the two elements were not together, as on *Infernal*, both sides suffered and the parts were of course lesser than the whole. After the split, the EDGE OF SANITY guys continued down the well-worn path of brutality, and couldn't come up with anything that would stand up in that genre, and certainly couldn't stand up to anything under the EDGE OF SANITY name. Swanö went down a completely different path, with *Moontower* being a bit

unlike anything heard before (closest comparison probably AMORPHIS' *Elegy*, and even that's an iffy comparison), so Dan was free of the shackles of his previous work. Now, he's taken it upon himself to not only take on the legacy of EDGE OF SANITY once again, but its most monumental work.

As noted, it's a failure in the most complete terms to being the kind of album that makes an entire scene sit up and take notice. It's just not anything new or worldbeating.

As a highly listenable, quality album-length song, it is a complete success. It's very melodic death metal, nothing too hard or heavy (the brutal riffs are almost always offset by a melodic lead line or backing keyboards), walking a fine line and never getting too hard or too soft. A shame, really, as it's those highly distinct section that break from the main themes in *Crimson I* that remain most memorable. Luckily for Swanö his strengths in songwriting revolve around the melodies and not crushing riffs. It's only a real issue when they come back with some of the musical themes from the first part that you notice nothing is allowed to be too in-your-face this time out...

The album is just one song, even if there are track markers every minute. Certainly avoids the "I can't find my favorite part easily!" whine from part one.

The story this time out was written by Clive Nolan (ARENA), taking place far in the future after the events of *Crimson I*. It's neither good or bad as a story by itself, as a nun in a monastery lets curiosity get the better of her in the place where the queen from part one is imprisoned, and she ends up pregnant (remember the 'raped by the wind' issues from the first part), and the evil one is reborn.

[www.metalprovider.com/eos](http://www.metalprovider.com/eos)

e l e n i u m

ELENIUM *For Giving- For Getting*  
9- 41:02 Rage of Achilles

"Progressive" death metal.

This album gave me fits for awhile because it was varied and not the same old boring crap, but at the same time there were these little annoyances that kept me from getting into the music. I think I understand now. You know all those wussy prog metal bands that you'd think was all cool and stuff if they just got some balls? Well that's ELENIUM, prog metal band with death growls and heavy guitars, substituting chunkier riffs for the often classically or jazz inspired riffs prog metal likes to give us. But clean up the guitars a bit and have a James LaBrie clone singing over this and you'd see a Limb or Inside Out logo on the back of this thing instead of Rage of Achilles. Everpresent keyboards are included in the package, and their style is the first indicator of their Finnish origin. The music keeps a nice mid-pace throughout, so it doesn't fall into CHILDREN OF BODOM territory, speeding this way and that, and the band seems really comfortable where they're at.

Not that this is any great accomplishment in the music world. There are problems. The vocals suck. The clean vocals that pop up here and there are wretched. Bands

that center around extreme vocals need to stop writing passages for clean vocals when they can't properly perform them. That's Songwriting 101 kind of stuff. He sounds like one of those droning gothy kinds of singers, but he's performing on material that's far more dynamic than he is. There are places where it works, such as in *Under the Mug* where the music is a lot more sedate, but for the most part he's in over his head. The growling vocals are pretty basic as well, not too extreme, but it is kind of funny hearing this guy trying to follow the standard prog metal formula for arranging vocals, but growling them instead of singing them. Given the material, I question the extensive use of the growling vocals as it just doesn't make sense... unless the alternative is the same guy doing the same clean vocals appearing all over the place, and so then I'm thankful. Your typical prog metal vocalist wouldn't win them originality points either so they've got some decisions to make if they want to make the step from newcomer with potential to fully realized musical powerhouse.

But with the vocals being as they are, the highlights of this album are all instrumental passages. *Subcreator* is by far the best song here, being a real rollercoaster ride for the ear, from the subdued orchestral intro to the wilder riffing... excellent stuff. Bits and pieces of instrumental interplay brilliance fly in and out of the material here, but it's not consistent in most of the songs and it is flattened out by the vocal performance.

The band's OK, but has a way to go before becoming something that everyone needs to pay attention to...

[www.elemband.com](http://www.elemband.com)

ELIS

ELIS *God's Silence, Devil's Temptation*  
11- 47:45 Napalm

Pop metal.

Female fronted, 'love metal' from Liechtenstein. The fact that I've never actually heard of any people from Liechtenstein before is the most interesting thing about this band. Not that the album's bad at all, but it's a tad schizophrenic and never quite gels. The band has one previous album *Twilight* that they released under the name ERBEN DER SCHÖPFUNG, and I'm curious as to whether it was closer to metal or pop. This just sounds so much like a band in transition, and not a band that's gotten to where they're going yet.

One side of the band is total pop rock, mixing synth backgrounds with the female vocals and the entire point is repeating vocals and getting a melody in your head. The other side is almost power-metal like, with double bass runs and lots of guitar solos. Some of the riffing is really mean, but at the same time some of the poppy bits are really sappy. The two elements don't really co-exist well. When the girl is singing, there's not much in the way of heavy stuff going on, so it switches off. The exceptions are *Devil's Temptation* and *My Only Love*, and that just exposes how thin the voice is in

comparison to heavy guitar work. I think there may be something worthy within this band, but the vocals aren't as varied as the music, making the singer seem worse than she really is. It's a sweet voice and the job gets done very well when singing on the lighter moments, and anyone into all of those Finnish bands that go on about love and pain and all that will likely get a kick out of this.

There are other things that pop up here and there, such as classical arrangements, a touch of electronics, German lyrics, and a countering, deep-almost-growling male voice to sometimes give a counter to the female vocals. None of these things pop up too much, just sprinkles here and there to change the songs up. In the end though, it's all on the vocals to hook you in with the melody because everything in this band serves that purpose. Even the guitar riffs and solos don't seem like they're meant to create their own identity, which is why I label this as a pop metal album.

I do have to note that the production is crystal clear and marvelous. Alex Krull must have magic fingers because production this nice is hard to come by these days. It helps the positive elements jump out of the speakers for sure.

[www.elis.li](http://www.elis.li)



FARMAKON *A Warm Glimpse*  
9- 47:36 Earache/Elitist

Opethian metal.

I heard a song or two from these guys while arsing around British highways on my way to Finland earlier this year, and the songs I heard were dreadful and laughable late-OPETH clonage. Thankfully, the entire album is not like that. However, *Blackwater Park* is stamped all over this thing due to the growled vocals being Åkerfeldt worship up and down the line, to the point where I'm really, really wondering if this is actually an uncredited hobby project of his. The clean vocals all sound like Åkerfeldt if he had no real confidence in his singing voice. I imagine *Orchid*'s vocals would have sounded like this if anything was sung with more power than a mumble. The lead guitar style takes from the OPETH cutting room floor as well, and in many places the riffing seems lifted as well. Did I mention the transitions into clean bits? And the clean bits themselves? The attempted identical production? It's maddening and ridiculous and considering I pretty much rejected *Deliverance* for being too much recycling, this is almost asking for scorn. Not that there's lots of OPETH close-clones out there (amazing considering the band's popularity, but maybe this is just the tip of the iceberg, and if so let me extend my middle finger to the idea immediately) but this is ridiculous.

Yet all is not lost and I hear a creative, interesting band just begging to be released from their hero-worship shackles. Everything except the clean vocals is immaculately performed. The sound is great. It is not a *bad* album from a 'if this was released out in space and

nobody ever heard their influences before' standpoint. Even some of the OPETH-alike parts show a whimsy to them that's at once pleasing (manipulating instead of regurgitating influences!) and frustrating (they're good enough to be FARMAKON instead of OPETH/2). Their tendency to jump into total funk mode is jarring, and the total wig-out that is *Flavoured Numerology* is a classic 'what-the-hell?' song. The effect is completely defeated when the next song is OPETH-copy *Pearl of My Suffering* (at least the first parts), but a flash of excellence is better than nothing. There are a good deal of cleanly-sung parts where there is no OPETH reference, but alas, the singing is not so good, even with attempted creativity. They're in a no-win situation like this, because if the only choices with this singer are sounding just like someone else, and sounding bad, what do you do? (Get someone else!)

So yeah, it's just like OPETH with some twists. With luck, this will be a collector's piece as documentation of a mondo weirdshit band's first steps towards total weirdshitality. With unluck, We'll have Åkerfeldt and the P-Funk All Stars.

<http://www.farmakon.cjb.net/>

## firebird

FIREBIRD *No. 3*  
10- 47:21 SPV

Rock.

I bought this solely for the reason that I owe it to myself to catch up on what Bill Steer has been up to these past few years. Yes, our ex-CARCASS/NAPALM DEATH friend has been active, now on his third album with Firebird. He plays guitar (obviously), sings, and also plays the... harmonica. Oh dear. The entire thing is not based in 70s hard rock (and I'm not talking SABBATH/PURPLE/RAINBOW, although ELF might not be a far comparison), it *is* 70s rock. Sometimes it's more upbeat and not so bad, but sometimes it's not, and it's like being in a time machine to visit the music that time forgot, and is glad for it. If Bill's happy, then so be it, because I can't say he sucks at doing this music, but this is pretty sad to listen to. This man *changed music* with his late 80s activities. His work on *Necroticism* and *Heartwork* redefined classy guitar playing... and now it sounds like he's going to dive into a cover of Freebird at any moment. I can't handle it, and I won't.

Oh, I must mention... Worst. Cover. Ever.

[www.firebirdhome.com](http://www.firebirdhome.com)

## FIREWIND

FIREWIND *Burning Earth*  
9- 44:47 Leviathan

Power metal.

Kostas Karamitroudis (aka Gus G) really needs to figure out what he wants to do and stick with it. He's a primary member here in FIREWIND, in DREAM EVIL, in MYSTIC PROPHECY, plus his guest appearances elsewhere. Some call him the hottest young guitar talent going today.

I say he's a savvy businessman for getting paid three different times for doing the same thing in three different bands. This is just by-the-numbers heavy/power metal with a singer that has more balls than your usual vocalist in this sort of music (Stephen Frederick, ex-KENZINER). It's not really a band, just a collection of musicians scattered across the globe (recordings took place in Norway, Greece, and right here in Georgia, and it's not like any of these people traveled).

It's an average album with nothing to make you cringe, but absolutely nothing that demands to be listened to above the morass of the scene.

[www.firewind.gr](http://www.firewind.gr)



HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE *The August Engine*  
7- 44:28 Cruz Del Sur

Metal.

After my hard push for the HAMMERS in 2001 (LotFP's naming their debut *The Bastard* as Best Album, Best Concept, and Best Packaging of 2001 is even used for this album's promotional campaign), the band was kind enough to provide me with an advance copy of their second album (untitled as of then) back in May 2002 as they searched out a label to release it. That search took well over a year, and as I write this in late October, the album still isn't out on CD for a few more weeks (vinyl already out). But I have had a lot of time to get to know this album, and that CD in the pink slimline with the smudged out song titles written in sharpie on the case has gotten as much or more playing time than anything else I've come across since May 2002, and I'm thrilled for the band that they are about to get some widespread attention. Not half as thrilled as everyone's going to be when they get to hear it themselves, that you can count on. This is a huge album. Even with having this album for so long, there was still some adjustments to be made when receiving a final version, as four songs were dropped from the final version. I dearly hope songs like Vexation and Church of Broken Glass aren't lost forever and will appear somewhere down the line, but for the short term, a forty-five minute album is easier to play again often than one stretching over an hour and the fact that my three favorite songs made the final cut means I'm not calling it a travesty or anything.

So where to begin? Comparing it to *The Bastard*, they've dropped all of the extreme metal mannerisms so there are no blast beats, there are no growling vocals, not even any very fast metal riffs. They've taken what was a major element of their

sound and decided they just didn't need it anymore. And you know what? They really don't need it any more. The songwriting is the smartest I've heard in forever, as each song has its own unique identity, moves into several sections, gives an introduction, a buildup, and a payoff. The idea of individual song identity on an album is of such major importance, but very few people out there seem to get it. So many times I get a CD and I do the listen-to-the-first-five-seconds-of-each-song trick and the starts of all the songs are the same. Hell, all too often I can correctly guess what the entire album sounds like enough to do an accurate review just based on the first seconds of all the songs. That is completely pathetic and there are plenty of musicians who should throw themselves at their fans' feet and beg for forgiveness for being such songwriting frauds. Well, if someone buys an album like that and likes it, I guess they deserve the fleecing? But how exactly do you think I feel when I do take the time to confirm that I didn't even have to listen to an album to know what I was going to hear? I wonder if the high turnover rate of the metal fanbase is because people grow up, or because they realize the gold-to-garbage ratio isn't very shiny? No such problems exist on *The August Engine*. Give it a five second test, thirty second test, or a five minute test. These songs stand up proudly on their own.

It's hard to say exactly where the band falls stylistically these days, but I have a feeling this is going to be clumsily lumped into the traditional/power metal category by most who review it. The album was originally going to be a lot slower and more acoustic, but with the slower stuff and the ballad removed, it is fair to say that some really old-school metal characteristics remain, but with the large amounts of acoustic guitar and quiet points, counterpoint vocals, and extended instrumental "jams", putting this into the same categories of PRIEST/MAIDEN, HELLOWEEN/GAMMA RAY, or even OMEN/MANILLA ROAD styled bands would be inaccurate to the point of lunacy. It's a heavy metal album that has little regard for being neatly placed within the metal genre, and it doesn't resort to folk, prog, jazz, or electronics to create its stylistic differences.

It's going to take an almost song-by-song description to do this album justice, so a song-by-song description you will get.

We start with *The August Engine Part 1*, which is a five minute instrumental. It's not your typical overblown intro, but rather a full instrumental workout done in a similar style to the rest of the album. In fact, it was originally called *Overture* and contains themes from all the songs on the album (even the songs no longer there!).

Out of that we go into a very gentle, mostly acoustic piece called *Rainfall*. Vocals are handled by Lorraine Rath (who did the artwork on *The Bastard*), with violin and cello performed by Kris

Force (Amber Asylum) and Sitara Kapoor, respectively. Considering most listeners don't consider instrumentals to be real songs (and let's face it, there are very, very, very few Orion quality works hanging out on heavy metal CDs) and it is common practice to kick off an album with a kick-ass, upbeat song, this is a bold placement of the song. The main idea of the song is that the acoustic guitars sound like a light rain falling, with the flourishes of the strings or the recurring piano melody (very simple but very effective). A pretty song, but not a happy one considering the message of the lyrics.

Rain, rain , rain

A thousand tiny drops upon the pane  
Marching in their millions toward the drain

And whose to say those drops are all the same?

To me, there is something a little bit disturbing about thinking about the individuality, and therefore the fate, of raindrops. I mean, as a kid the idea that no two snowflakes are identical was plugged into my head, but who cares, right?

The album kicks into high gear with A Room and a Riddle, which is the closest thing this album's going to get to a total metal tune. Very traditionally based, it's the first time we hear both Mike Scalzi (THE LORD WEIRD SLOUGH FEG) and Janis Tanaka (FIREBALL MINISTRY, ex-L7), and they are introduced together, singing a duet as they often do on the album. It is mostly Mike's song to sing though, and congratulations to those who are going to be newly introduced to his unique singing style. The song is more involved than most 'traditional' songs, as there are so many individual parts that flow seamlessly together, it's a far more roundabout verse-chorus-verse arrangement, but the verses and choruses are further divided up. On an album full of great ideas, the most straightforward metal song still manages to be one of the best on the album. That main riff is certainly headbanging material for sure! Lyrically, the song begins following a candle, which would have made a lot more sense if the song where the candle was introduced was still in the tracklist between Rainfall and this one, but it was another slow song and I understand having your album opened up with instrumental-slow-slow is perhaps not the best thing. This is still a metal album, and you don't want the actual metal appearing to break the atmosphere established so far on the album.

The August Engine Part 2 starts in immediately with Scalzi singing over a more slow, grinding kind of riff. This starts off more in the doom vein, but soon enough opens up and turns into a loosely structured jam session that's all over the place. This isn't a super-technical group, so it's not like they're going all LTE on us, but more like one of those parts that makes it on the album version of a SKYNYRD hit song, but not onto the radio. Without sounding all southern and hickified or anything. Just good melodic ideas, good interplay between the instruments, and a good solo or three. It's actually

interesting in here. But I'm not completely clear on the lyrical content in this one. Cobbett certainly is able to turn a phrase or two though:

If I'm a lie, and maybe it's true

Still it is I that created you

And when you die, I'd have you believe

That even your ghost is shackled to me

As are those who bear your memory

Insect is an interesting proposition because it starts with acoustic guitar work that sounds awfully like we're supposed to think it's raining again. Unlike Rainfall though, this song builds in tension, until it just goes off into heavy metal wonderland. The song really explodes into mental fireworks as there is a verse that is done under acoustics with Tanaka singing none to forcefully, and then they come back to it in full heavy metal mode with Mike singing those same lines but Tanaka answering back with different lines in counterpoint. I'm always amazed that vocal arrangements are so boring in metal, and HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE has heard my call and has come to save the day. I can't properly express how cool this one section is.

You want the best metal song of 2003? Doomed Parade. I have sometimes gotten stuck for hours just listening to this song on repeat- and not just when the album was a new experience!- and singing along and just being amazed that a song like this exists. That record labels far and wide didn't hear this song and hear quality... fuck that... that record labels far and wide didn't hear this song and just think that they're money in the bank, I am wondering what got in their ears. Let's see, Nuclear Blast will release *Hymn to Life*, but not HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE. Metal Blade continues to sign the worst bands from played-out trends, but they can't manage to get anything of HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE's quality on their label? Century Media can sign some angsty forty year old screaming woman to cash in on that oh so huge British market, but they can't sign HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE? This industry sucks! Anyway, the song is broken up into three parts. The first part opens with an Opethian strum'n'swell, leading into a non-Opethian downbeat metal consciousness with Mike being all sorrowful and we hit more paydirt in the lyrical phrase department:

So soon the moon will come unfold her robe of  
constellations

And for a time the night was mine in endless  
fascination

But now she brings me only shadows and a host of  
memories

Marching on

Endlessly

Like a ghostly brigade

Marching on- Doomed parade

This section also has another back and forth with Janis and Mike vocally, more straightforward than the Insect mindmelt but cool nonetheless. The song then drops into something else, which is pretty

much just taking a full minute to transition into the next section of the song. It's a beautiful buildup of tension, and when that tension finally explodes in the song, it's the best music to my ears I've heard in a long, long time. Janis Tanaka unleashes the most venomous condemnation and between her sharp delivery tempered by the soft voice and the pure poetry of the lines, this band needs to be in front of a big festival crowd with thousands of people singing along at the top of their lungs...

Here is a wound, to go with your uniform  
Here is a message, you'll never forget

Back in your tomb, reaping your true reward

The path you have chosen, you'll learn to regret

After that release, the song just drops off into the lightest section of the album, with Tanaka singing a lullaby with acoustic guitar backing. It's a false calm though, because the end of that passage ends with another explosion into a full on metal section which segues into the final portion of the song where Mike comes back basically repeating the first verse (different lyrics though) and then into the closing section of the song. It really is a huge song, and epic in five and a half minutes, running through just about every emotion that heavy metal is qualified to represent.

If *The Trial and the Grave* isn't one giant monster of a doom song, then there are no giant doom songs on Earth. I had trouble with this song at first because it's such a downer that comes right after a song with no equal and it lasts eleven minutes, but on its own merits, it certainly hangs in the upper doom echelons. Tanaka does the vocals on her own, soft and somber, about finding a grave and discovering the circumstances of the death of the girl in it.

The sentence was passed

The barristers laughed

When they had killed her they cut her in half

When golden birds flew

Out from her severed halves

They trapped them to sell to the gathered riff-raff

It is creepy stuff, because the song starts slow, and gets slower still as it progresses. The desperation in the vocals is evident, and the multitracked vocals on some points furthers the uneasy feeling as the same lines are at times sung differently at the same time. It's a very linear song, little in the way of repeating melodies or anything, it just trudges on, almost like the album knows it is coming to its end, has resigned itself to that fact, and will not go happily. The three final minutes of the song and album are bereft of any singing at all, just two doom riffs, one low and one high, going into oblivion. If this song were on a *CATHEDRAL* album it'd be called one of their best ever, and if it appeared on a *SABBATH* album it would be hailed as one of the all-time great long songs. Then again, maybe not, as I don't think any of the vocalists for either of those bands could have pulled off the song the way Tanaka does (well maybe Dio could have, because let's face it, he can do whatever he wants with his voice and it always

sounds good), adding a sensitivity to the story. Good call leaving Scalzi off of this one.

So there's the album, song by song more or less. I have to throw some notes in about the production. It's not a perfect recording by any means, with the main problem for most listeners probably going to be the lack of that crisp, sharp twenty-first century digital sound. I don't know that this is an analog recording, but I do know that no editing was done on the basic tracks after they were laid down. The instruments are all audible, including the bass which has some excellent opportunities to take its own space in the recordings (*August Engine 2* and *Doomed Parade* most notably). The acoustic guitar resonates as it should, and the various voices that pop up in the songs all meld well. Totally pro job. As far as the material itself, the only complaint I really have is in *Doomed Parade* where Mike doesn't finish off his verses with the truly anguished cries I feel he should. He sings the line fine but if you're going to sing about the anguish of losing someone to hell, needs a bit more than being sung fine to be convincing. So how's that for a nitpicky nit pick?

The lyrics on the album both delight and confuse me. They are awesome in that they are easily heard, you don't need a lyric sheet to figure much of anything out, and there are phrases everywhere that just stick with you. It's not pandering singalong stuff, but honest to goodness good writing and good performance getting that. I am confused because there are lyrical themes that run throughout the album, but apparently this isn't really a linear concept album. But after the interview, and finding out *A Room and a Riddle* is basically about getting introduced to the metal scene, it made me wonder... what if this really is a straight-up concept album after all? Cobbett's obviously no fan of how metal has moved in the past several years. But what if the lyrics of the album, from front to back, are simply an attack on the current state of heavy metal? It can all fit. Work with me here as I put a probably-wrong hypothesis in print. *Rainfall* sets the stage, basically putting forth the idea that where one ends up is left to fate. Nobody gets into metal on purpose, do they? It's always an accidental discovery. Then check out these lyrics from the untitled, not-on-the-album song that came between *Rainfall* and *A Room and a Riddle*:

Slowly I woke up and opened my eyes

Then through the haze I beheld a surprise

So passed the candle yet held by no hand

Floating right past as I struggled to stand

The candle's flame in spite of the wind

Did not flicker nor sputter nor even grow dim

I stumbled and struggled pursuing the light

Of a candle that floats on its own through the night  
There's plenty more, but this all fits both the setup from *Rainfall*, where the chance of seeing the candle was not something that could be controlled, and then there's actually the choice to follow it. But

does it lead to the sewer or the sea? And tell me that the candle could not represent heavy metal itself. It's something that to normal people just doesn't exist, but when someone first get exposed to it, it seems like the strongest thing in the world, doesn't it? This amazing thing that shouldn't be there, but is, stronger than anyone could figure unless they're right there in the middle of it. And a repeating line, 'Vaguely aware that I follow the flame/For its destination and mine are the same.' Metal assimilates you quickly, making you think it's a part of you, where you go, metal is there. But when we are just getting our feet wet in it, or more appropriately when we are drawn to it like a moth to a flame, we chase it... A Room and a Riddle has been revealed already as representing the two faced assholes that inhabit the scene, wearing the uniform to hide their own insecurities. Being because it's the only place that will have them, instead of being there because they should. The opening lines fit the metal experience perfectly:

So: the candle has passed through a portal  
Stayed by a sentry as I try to follow  
Changing my cloak to a gown to gain entry  
There in the center its bearer awaits

Not many go into metal without changing their wardrobes. Band T-shirts, some leather, spikes and studs if you're really enthused. You can't deny that there is a 'metal uniform', and you know all those people at metal shows weren't born wanting to wear black jeans and black shirts. The song deals with being coerced into the brotherhood so to speak, and if you're not careful in the early days of metal, you will run afoul of the scene police, that dictates if you are to be metal, you must look a certain way and act a certain way. The next song was to be Vexation (One of Them), which didn't make the final cut, and if I'm interpreting by ear, would be where one realizes that what you're caught up in with the metal scene really has nothing to do with the impulses that made that candle such an important thing to follow in the first place. Cynicism follows. We move to The August Engine Part 2, and I think this could be delivered from the point of view of a large label, or MTV. I've printed some of the lyrics already, but check out this verse:

Within you live my manufactured dreams  
Soon we'll be repackaging your quaint rebellious  
schemes  
Within this august engine's power  
To vindicate or to devour  
As armies march and temples tower

From there, still wanting the spirit of what drew you in but completely losing all faith in it, we get to The Church of Broken Glass, the final song that didn't make the final cut. My theory strains a bit here, but I think the idea of the lines...

I thought I had a prayer down in this church  
Of broken glass  
But I awoke to find myself asleep  
And in glass, my soul to keep

... seem to indicate a last attempt at finding a shelter that allows you to deal with the candle and its bearer instead of withered children clutching knives. Obviously it doesn't work because the album continues its descent into madness (and what else could full immersion in the metal scene be, with its long distance traveling for shows, the purchasing of hundreds, if not thousands, of CDs be... if not madness?). Insect is again dealing with the mass-market money machines involved with metal, where the true faithful is the insect to be swatted away in favor of those who won't dig and search for themselves, but accept a watered down version of the real thing at face value and take it as that real thing.

Bad little insects find it tricky to survive  
As they infest the sickest segments of the hive  
Though we might whisper pretty words from time to  
time

They'll get no honey like the ones who stay in line  
It is true that the bigger a record label, the more they will seem at odds with the most die-hard fans? Once again, your Metal Blades, Nuclear Blasts, and Century Medias are going to catch more flack for some of their decisions and signings than things like Willowtip or Jester Records will. And the big guys are less likely to care when someone shouts 'Foul!' over it because they're looking for another audience. Doomed Parade then represents the final defeat, the spirit dead. The Trial and the Grave is looking back at what exactly went wrong and what killed everything.

So that makes the final version of the album go from fate to following the candle to dealing with the business machine over two songs to dealing with the loss to discovering the final fate of what you lost. The story still fits, it's just missing some story elements which really turn out to be non-essential. I wonder if I've just figured this thing out or have just put forth complete bullshit on the lyrics, haha. There are some ideas that I just can't make fit in anywhere, but very obviously do connect the songs. The at-first unseen bearer of the candle is the same one that is lost and lamented over in Doomed Parade, and also the one whose grave is visited in The Trial and the Grave. I can't figure out what the golden birds really are, and I know they're vitally important because it's their claw on the cover. Frustrating... but after this long, there are still things to uncover so I'll still be figuring it out. To close this monster out, I realize I'm hyping this album to ridiculous degrees, but I do believe it, and I do feel it. Even if you don't believe this degree of hype, do believe that it is original, diverse, quality stuff, and go from there. That should be enough of a recommendation to buy, buy, buy.

[www.hammersofmisfortune.com](http://www.hammersofmisfortune.com)



**LEGION *Unseen to Creation***

11- 36:25 Listenable

Royalty checks made out to: Jon Nödtevidt, Johan Norman, Ole Ohman, and Peter Palmdahl. They really couldn't have dissected this style any better.

[www.legion.nu](http://www.legion.nu)



**MORBID ANGEL *Heretic***

14- 53:14 Earache

Death metal.

*Heretic* doesn't sound like *Gates of Annihilation*, which didn't sound like *Formulas Fatal to the Flesh*, which didn't sound like *Domination*, so to say the band is just churning out the same stuff all the time is in no way accurate. Yet the material sounds quite tired and there is no excitement for me in this album. I remember, once upon a time, just going insane at the idea of a new MORBID ANGEL album, hunting down *Covenant* and *Domination* in stores right around the time of release. And they didn't disappoint. Every single album since *Domination* has been rather boring. Was David Vincent that important? I guess so... but it's not like the GENITORTURERS didn't go down the tubes around the time he joined, so bloody hell.

There's a mean and nasty triarchy of problems that really make this album a total chore to listen to. First off, Steve Tucker is a boring, boring growler. He has a deep, gruff growl, with zero enunciation. On *Formulas* it was just as well, as nobody really wanted to hear all that Goo Goo Ga Ga loud and clear, did they? Here, I don't know if it's real lyrics or more pseudo-Sumerian (you do know Azagthoth was making that all up, right?), it's just a generic growl. MORBID ANGEL's legendary reputation was built on Trey's death metal Yngwieisms, yes. It was built on Pete Sandoval's insane drumming, yes. And I think it was also built on the fact that you could sing along with their songs. If I scream "Ghouls, attack the church!", anybody that was around in 1989 can finish off the *whole fucking verse*. Not because they read the lyrics sheet, but because they could pick it up by ear. Care seemed to be taken with the vocals in the old days, something they are forgetting now, to their defeat. The second disaster is that the last two tracks of the album are solos. Trey finishes it off with a solo called Born Again, and right before that... a near five minute DRUM SOLO called... Drum Check. Fits quite well with song titles like Victorious March of

Rain the Conqueror, God of Our Own Divinity, and Cleansed in Pestilence (Blade of Elohim), doesn't it? Can there be a more pathetic thing to appear on an album? The third downfall of the album is the production. It's a trend we'll be seeing more of from bands that actually make money versus those that have resigned themselves to the fact that they'll never see a dime. Recording budgets are dropping across the board as sales drop across the board. Instead of going into a real studio with a real producer and eating up all of the budget and leaving no money for themselves, bigger bands (NEVERMORE and KING DIAMOND are who I'm thinking about at the moment) are deciding to use more home recording techniques, or going into no-name studios, and using less-than-name producers, if they're using producers at all. Then they pocket the difference. Sometimes, it works, and all is happy as the musicians keep some cash and the fans get something worth having. At other times, we get a *Heretic*. The guitars on this album sound like complete shit, like the closest approximation they could get to that *Domination* sound, and if we're going to get MORBID ANGEL albums completely based around guitars instead of clever songwriting that combines all present ingredients, they should at least come across powerfully. So it sounds like garbage, but I bet Trey can sit around and still play some video games for awhile longer between stints as opening act for metal bands bigger than themselves. Kings of the scene, baby.

At this rate, here are my recommendations for future album titles: *Is the Band Done Yet?*, *Just One More...*, *Killer Kuts Kompilation!*, *Lots of Bands Already Stole These Riffs*, *Many Old Ideas*, *Not Another One*, *Old Riffs From The Old Ones*, *Pretty Much The Same Old Shit*, *Quick Release Another Album!*, *Rutan's Back For Six Months Again*, *Sailor Moon Meets Chulhu*, *Tentacle Rape (The Anime Album)*, *Unbelievable Longevity*, *Victims of Repetition*, *We're Not Done Yet*, *Xactly What You'd Expect*, *Yog-Sothoth Wants His Lyrics Back*, *Zzzzz*.

Bottom line, MORBID ANGEL used to write classic songs that caused the albums they were on to be classics. Now they're writing a MORBID ANGEL album and forgetting the songs, and haven't even bothered to do anything with the album to distract us from that fact. It's like we're supposed to love this because of the logo on the cover and not the music on the disc. Fuck 'em.

[www.morbidangel.com](http://www.morbidangel.com)



**NAPALM DEATH *Noise For Music's Sake***

56- 153:36 Earache

Gods of Grind!

When one of the classic bands leaves Earache, typically the band gets a 'rarities' compilation or live release designed as a last cash-out by the label who owns the

rights for the material. BOLT THROWER, CARCASS, ENTOMBED (they got two!) come to mind. Now it's NAPALM DEATH's turn, but with a twist as it was actually done with the band's cooperation (whether Napalm Death left on good terms or not, I guess they realized this thing was getting released with or without their approval so why not have their hands on it?). The result is this packed double CD monster that's one of my better purchases this year.

The first CD is basically a best-of, with the second CD being the out of print EP material (some of this is even on the first CD), live versions, alternate mixes, etc. The booklet is incredible, with an introduction, decent-sized interviews with Shane Embury and Barney Greenway, an in-depth walk-through of where all the second CD tracks came from, and then a separate insert with a huge NAPALM DEATH family tree which is amazing to sift through but hardly as comprehensive as they want you to believe (Bill Steer's FIREBIRD isn't on here, which is silly as it's his going concern on its third album, and BLOOD FROM THE SOUL is mentioned...), but whoever designed it must have been pulling their hair out as it is.

NAPALM DEATH is the band that made me a metalhead, and I can assure you that the tracklisting is in-fucking-credible, even making the nappy late-90s albums (before their 00s reawakening after they were off the label) seem essential by cherry-picking the impressive tracks. And the interviews don't shy away from mentioning that period, either.

You do need to take the title of this package at face value though. The first four songs are from the first album and don't even take two minutes total, with You Suffer being less a second long. It's just a whirlwind blast, not so precise or technical... just chaos. It's interesting that so much of their current live set is taken from those early days, but you can hear the progression as the years go by, how the band gets more refined in their songwriting. Some times to great effect, sometimes not. But what drove me to obsession with this wall of noise was that the band was about something. Wasn't just noise and destruction and rebellion, the band actually has a message. Now as I grew up, I came to strongly disagree with some (not all!) of the band's viewpoints (they can be *fiercely* political) The only real complaint with this thing is if a newer fan is buying this, there's no indication which albums the songs on the first CD are taken from, and the offhand mentions of a couple of them in the booklet doesn't count. Ah well, I'm not one of *those* weird people... but the songs aren't in any sort of order, so it's not like you can say "I like these last four songs best so I should check out one of the later albums. So if they're not targeting new fans of the band, then they're targeting people who are already fans of the band, in which case what the hell are all of these album tracks doing here?"

But like I didn't plunk my money down anyway. There's good stuff here for all.

[www.enemyofthemusicbusiness.com](http://www.enemyofthemusicbusiness.com)

# Rain Paint

RAIN PAINT *Nihil Nisi Mors*

8- 50:21 My Kingdom

Melodic doom/death.

... although on the promotional material the label sends along it says "File Under: Intense and Emotional Metal". I wonder if stores that otherwise might buy this thing wholesale end up not doing so because some dumbass purchaser checks and confirms that his store has no Intense and Emotional Metal section? Just wondering...

RAIN PAINT is a side project of the Finnish bands FRAGILEHOLLOW and RAPTURE, and fits really close into what RAPTURE is doing stylistically these days. Big, sweeping songs full of bittersweet melodies, contrasting with really heavy and brutal sections. A combination of KATATONIA and the death dirge style of metal, with keyboard/piano action. Vocals are split up between deep growls (it's the RAPTURE guy which means half the time it sounds like Mikael Åkerfeldt) and a the smoother, clean vocalist. It's real rainy day metal music, laid back yet emotional.

There were some unnecessary bits... like the crying baby in Raven Nevermore, the volume swell at the end of Loose and Over (that will really kill passive listeners), and the eight minutes of silence after that leading to the 'hidden' thirty seconds of drum beats. How useless and pointless can you get?

It's tough to judge this one. It's a solid release of the style, but like many of its ilk, doesn't have standout songs to make it a must buy, and doesn't really have any standout characteristics to point out. But if you're a fan of the second RAPTURE album or the OCTOBER TIDE stuff, this is a very safe investment...

<http://rainpaint.cjb.net>

# seethings

SEETHINGS *Parallels*

13- 60:45 Scarlet

Nu metal.

I had been curious as to what Lawrence Mackrory was up to, considering his wild performance on DARKANE's *Rusted Angel* and his beyond-the-norm singing on ANDROMEDA's *Extension of the Wish* were suitably impressive and showed a range of talents not normally heard. Turns out his main band (formerly known as FORCEFEED) is shooting straight for the mainstream 'hard music' crowd. From their own biography, in their own words: "SEETHINGS fits well into the rock climate of today. With their heavy groove and compelling melodies they have been compared to such well established acts as TOOL, LINKIN PARK, STAINED, A PERFECT CIRCLE and DEFTONES."

What a waste...

[www.seethingsonline.com](http://www.seethingsonline.com)

# Seven Seraphim

SEVEN SERAPHIM *Believe in Angels*  
10- 38:23 Scarlet

Neoclassical metal.

If SYMPHONY X is the big mansion on the hill with the cool hedge maze, SEVEN SERAPHIM is some really cheesy analogy that expresses how crappy it is in comparison to SYMPHONY X. It's almost not a big deal when a bunch of kids get together, form a band, copy their heroes, and release a pathetic and unoriginal album. Another tree in the forest, another flake in the snowbank, another bad analogy in a review full of it. But this guitar shredding thing isn't something you learn for a laugh. All that hard work, all those many hours of practice... Shredderclone #451 is Andrew Szucs, which would almost be a joke that writes itself. Thing is, he doesn't suck at all, unless we keep it to the songwriting category. Cliché, cliché, cliché. Guitar wank heavy metal, you know it, so that's all I'm saying about the music.

I guess I should note that while I don't have the lyrics available to me, there is some sort of color motif going on with the songs. Lady Jade, Song Blaque, Dance in the Red, The Rain Keeps Falling (Thru Rose Coloured Glass), etc. Not a clue what it means, but at least they seem to have put more than two seconds' thought here, eh?

But oh God does the singer do his best to sabotage the album. He sounds OK a lot of the time, but when he tries to go for high notes, he's the drizzling shits. He keeps a good amount of power, but doesn't hit what he thinks he's hitting, sounding more like Freddy Krueger's claws on a chalkboard. Makes me appreciate Mark Boals one hell of a lot more.

So yeah, this one ain't so hot. Highly skilled diddly-doo with a singer that is often ruinous, with zero originality.

# STRATOVARIUS

STRATOVARIUS *Elements Pt. 2*  
9- 50:42 Nuclear Blast

Powerless metal.

What in the hell is Timo Tolkki's problem? I think the entire point of STRATOVARIUS (and all of Tolkki's work) lately is light over darkness, beauty over ugliness, victory over adversity. Unfortunately, for some reason, be it Tolkki's not-so-elegant mastery over the English language (or maybe it's just plain old idiocy, I don't know) or his pretentious, overblown compositions, he comes across as the most emotionally fragile human being on Earth who desperately needs a hug from someone. Anyone. That in itself could make for extremely moving music in most cases, but not in Timo's case. No, Timo's complete want of everything to be all right and groundless claims of strength expose him to be a complete fruit loop and probably an herbosexual with the way he tries to tie his own self-help blatherings in with this whole *Elements* concept. He's trying so hard to tell us he's not a frail little boy in

songs titled I Walk To My Own Song, I'm Still Alive, and Awaken the Giant that it seems he's protesting way too much, if you take my meaning. Again, an artist baring his soul can be cool, but in this case it's comparable me making a cry for help about my weight by dropping my shorts and exposing a cottage cheese-textured ass. It's just repulsive and nobody's going to want to help, they're just going to want to fucking kill me. And that's how I feel about Timo Tolkki while listening to STRATOVARIUS.

So who likes this kind of thing? Using undiscovered evidence, I have pieced together this bullshit re-enactment of a chance meeting between STRATOVARIUS fans. Let's listen in... One STRATOVARIUS fan is walking down the street somewhere in Anytown, USA. He sees another man walking towards him on the sidewalk, wearing a shirt emblazoned with the comfortably familiar weeblo-adorned STRATOVARIUS logo on it. "You like STRATOVARIUS?" "Yeah! You do too?" "Definitely! This is so cool, I never knew anyone around here liked them! Dude, this is too cool, want to come to my therapy group with me on Thursday?"

It's Jörg Michael that I feel most sorry for. When listening to previous STRATO stuff, all I'd ever heard from Jörg was RUNNING WILD's *Black Hand Inn* (highest recommendations for a power metal album, no shit), which is pretty cool stuff drummerifically, but hardly something to think 'world class talent' from. Well after hearing some of his work with RAGE and MEKONG DELTA, I'm officially sorry that's he's been recording with this band for seven years now. While I assume it is a paying gig, it's got to be completely unfulfilling... Not as unfulfilling as bassist Jari Kainulainen though, who's barely noticeable and hasn't even had his own solo album or resume of albums done with better bands.

What's fun about STRATOVARIUS lately, and most telling, is that while the albums are more cheery brighto, Tolkki is completely losing it when it comes to the reality. Any negative words against *Hymn to Life* were considered attacks, to the point where Timo was going on the message boards of at least one webzine and blasting the writer for being unprofessional and threatening to never interview with detractors again (yeah, like someone who's been vomitized by *Hymn to Life* is going to want to shoot the shit with its creator anyway). Complete five year old stomping and crying kind of stuff! And then when he realized *Elements I* was leaked on the internet, he and Jens became Tactical Strike Force Alpha, posting maps of where downloads were coming from and threatening to not tour those territories, and then finally pouting as they posted some samples online. How anyone could do anything but laugh at them from that point on is beyond me.

There's a reason there's a lot of personal attacks in reviews of Tolkki's work lately. People realize his work is very personal. People also realize it really, really sucks. And just like current travels up the stream of someone pissing on an electric fence, so does the ire of critics travel up the personal work to the person behind it. And when Timo throws tantrums about it, it just makes it that much more fun.

On the plus side, maybe this review will gain me another excellent reading recommendation from Jens.

And for those of you complaining that this isn't a real review, just call it *Seventh Coming of Fourth Dimension*. The balladry is just awful beyond words, with Kotipelto sounding so inappropriate with that vibrato in these situations that I wish he'd do a magic show with some white tigers real soon. The speedier tunes are just not very superior to things that bands like EDGUY or FREEDOM CALL are doing, and I can't think of a single song that made me go "Well this isn't a complete waste" over five listens. And it's not like this band invented anything to be allowed to sit on its ass and milk it to eternity. To those that say I was already prepared to dislike this before listening to it, you're right. *Elements I* bored me. I was prepared to be bored again. But this is beyond boredom, it's just sad. Not the atrocity against the ears that *Hymn to Life* was, but still, get this fucking thing out of my stereo.

And if I'm giving Tolkki far more 'credit' for the writing than is due, blame it on the wonderful record label information sheets they give which doesn't actually talk about the album at all, making it half as useful as a sheet of paper that's blank on both sides.

[www.stratovarius.com](http://www.stratovarius.com)



VOIVOD *Voivod*

13- 65:41 Chophouse/Surfdog

Heavy metal.

I really wanted to like the new VOIVOD. I got a three track sampler with a personally addressed letter from Jason Newsted back in January that really impressed the living crap out of two girls that were hanging around the day it came in. After the night I had, I'll make Jason Newsted a deal. If he just writes me letters, and not CDs, I'll think he's the greatest musician EVER. Unfortunately, the full CD came soon after. VOIVOD is a sad, sad band. Many people remember when they were the band that thinks outside the box, and their older albums (up to and including *Angel Rat*) are a real joy and a history of how metal can move forward. Unfortunately for them, that box they were thinking outside of has been packed with the marrow-sucked bones of metal history and packed in the corner of some out of work musician's garage. And the band is sitting there, outside that same box, wondering where all their fans went. VOIVOD 2003 is the least interesting French Canadian metal band I can think of with a record deal. So Snake's back. The man who can not, and could never, sing, sings loud and clear on every single song. He's had his moments in the past, mainly when it sounded like the band was out of their minds so the odd voice fit. Now it's a bunch of old men who once broke ground and now are breaking wind all over the metal scene. Funniest of all in this travesty is Newsted, who comes off the METALLICA gig and joins this band as almost a messiah figure, finally going to give this band the visibility it deserves... and in the first week Mr. Starmaker couldn't get two thousand soundscanned so in a frenzied panic, joins Ozzy's band in a desperate attempt to stay relevant to the kidz and to have a positive cash flow. Pretty fucking funny, and the flop of

this album saved us all from all the MTV kids talking about VOIVOD as the debut of the year.

This album's fucking boring, if you actually wanted me to talk about it.

[www.voivod.com](http://www.voivod.com)



WHILE HEAVEN WEPT *Of Empires Forlorn*  
7- 43:17 Rage of Achilles/Eibon

Majestic Doom.

So when I interviewed WHW, I didn't put their logo on the cover of the issue so in some ways I made the feature come across as 'lesser', which is to my shame because it really doesn't get much better than this. It must be noted that the Rage of Achilles and Eibon pressings are very different animals, with the RoA edition having less snazzy packaging, but the mix has been improved and I know what is more important to me in a music product, so...

It's for the most part slower paced metal with clear, high vocals (death growl just once if I recall correctly) with a thick, layered sound that makes the album sound huge. The details in the placement of the vocals, the keyboards (kept largely in the background), and the decisions of when to throw in the surprise (the aforementioned growl, the guitar hero solo, etc), and the strength of the songs themselves make this album a must-have.

If there are complaints about the album, they would probably be for the non-doom crowd the fact that the album's pacing doesn't bounce around a lot. It's comfortable where it is in its flow and doesn't feel the need to break it. If you're used to the double kick coming in and speeding everything up, you're going to wonder why these guys are riding the brakes. The other complaint was for the doom crowd as there are points where this is just so majestic that it's impossible to have any sort of negative mood. It's positively uplifting, which I think creates wonderful contrast to the rest of the often forlorn (hah) material.

Great, great album.

[www.whileheavenwept.net](http://www.whileheavenwept.net)

Welcome  
to the

Crap List

LotFP cleans out its Review Drawers

I've got over one hundred CDs on my desk that I have absolutely no worthwhile opinion about. I can't even come up with a serious cohesive paragraph about them. But they offend me, so I can not ignore them, but I can't pretend these are serious reviews. Pity these albums for having been made. Pity me for having been made to listen to them. And brag that you didn't have to.

## as i Lay dying

There's a skull on the cover and I can hear both Gothenburg and hardcore influences. Yup, AS I LAY DYING's album *Frail Words Collapse* is a complete non event. Has anyone else noticed that America's melodic death metal scene is an abortion? At this point a band of this style, from here or Europe, has to fool me into thinking it's better than *Jester Race*, *Slaughter of the Soul*, and *The Gallery* before I'll give a rat's ass. And you know what? None of these bands can even fool me into thinking that.

## AXENSTAR

Far be it for me to say that AXENSTAR's *Far From Heaven* is far from good, because it falls smack dab (what a wonderful saying. Whoever came up with it should be shot, and if I ever say 'smack dab' again, please poke me in the eye with a stick) into the 'generic power metal category'. Adequate performances, Good sound quality, and boring as shit songs. The fact that this used to be an IRON MAIDEN cover band is pretty amazing because none of this sounds like MAIDEN at all. Thank God for HELLOWEEN, or there wouldn't be half as many metal bands around these days, which means total releases would be down, and what a shame that would be. Mmm hmm. On the plus side, you don't have to listen to it more than once to "get it", so it saves time for me.

## BATHORY

Listening to a BATHORY album is like going to a vending machine. If nobody buys anything but the Snickers, pretty soon you're going to have a vending machine full of Snickers bars. Quorthon can't sell any bags of *Destroyer of Worlds* chips or packs of *Octagons* to save his life, so he's hoping that Vikings really satisfy. *Nordland*'s too little, too late, because everyone thinks they still like Snickers, but when faced with choices of A1 through F9 of Snickers, they're going to give up on this vending machine and start going across the street to the deli get a sandwich.

## BATTLELORE

There's something deeply disturbing about a band that sounds like BAL SAGOTH and [insert Finnish love metal band's name here]'s stillborn child. Somewhere in the concept is a good band dying to be heard, but BATTLELORE certainly isn't it. In the end, all they are is a good makeup job and potential LORDI support band. You'll be a long time in scraping crap off your shoe if you step in *Sword's Song*.

## BRAINSTORM

I don't care how heavy or catchy BRAINSTORM is, and I don't care how cool Andy B. Franck sounds. The guy is a plagiarist that got caught with his pants down and instead of apologizing, shrunk his balls up and tried ran away from it. Fuck *Soul Temptation* and fuck him.

## Dark Moor

They've had a massive lineup change since last time, but are still playing the same old same old. Sure, the female vocalist is gone, but she was just trying to sound like Fabio Leone anyway, sounded second rate at it, so the fact that a man replaced her and still sounds like a second rate Fabio Leone copy means that the band has not had any great tragedy here. They seem to be wanting to start over because their new album is self-titled, but who cares when effectively nothing has changed? The band was wildly successful with *Hall of Olden Dreams* in making a very RHAPSODY album full of quality arrangements and nice melodies, but I think that was just a miracle of luck. Everything else that they've done has just been overblown and underthought. No miracles happen on this album, and with the retarded themes and lyrics on this album, and by calling their website "Magic Land", they aren't even differentiating themselves from the band FAIRYLAND, which is where the departed DARK MOOR people went to. Lyrics full of "Attila the Hun is bad seed" and "All people is fleeing" garbage doesn't help their case.

## DEATHWITCH

Not that I'm not an open minded famous music journalist or anything, but scribbled-on-a-notebook quality logo with a puke green cover, an album titled *Violence Blasphemy Sodomy*, and songs titled *Necrosodomizer*, *Blood Sucking Fuck*, and *Bitchfinder* do not strike me as elements of a band that's making any noise that people need to be excited about hearing. Old sounding death-thrash with spastic solos (apologies to Mr. Jarzombek for suggesting SPASTIC solos when that isn't close to correct) may be of note to the 'grey mullet and ripped denim vest' crowd, but I require albums to pass the 'three second' test before declaring them at least listenable. The three second test is listening to just the first three seconds of every song to see if they sound different from each other. Even more sick the fact that after giving a full listen, I could have written the same crap about this album with just the three second test. There is something of note though. On the little promotional CD are numerous 'Fuck Off!' notices, and the line "Note to Journalists: DEATHWITCH don't give a FUCK what you think..." Yeah, I care if people who obviously are interested in the activity of corpseassfucking care about what I think. Question of the day though. If the band doesn't care about what I think, why did this appear in my mailbox? Clerical error? Clever form of hate mail? Or maybe the message really is, "The band doesn't care, but the record label does so please ignore the silly little band's silly little slogans and please pay attention to us and write about us so we get market awareness up and sell some units to some distributors and then tell them no returns, so we make our money even if not one single solitary fan ever buys a copy!" Bitch.

## Elend

ELEND was one of those bands in the Holy Records heyday that people had to pretend to like in order to seem like a cultured, sophisticated metalhead. I tried to get into them. I promise. Then they got signed to Music For Nations and promptly dropped off the face of the planet, and nobody missed them. Now they're back, and still, nobody is missing them. *Winds Devouring Men* is what's been stolen from you when you're tossing and turning in bed at night wondering why you can't sleep. It used to be nothing happening with random shrieking over it. Now it's just nothing happening.



ESTROGENOCIDE's first CD was a piece of shit. Weak pseudo industrial metal about hating women. It was thematically like ANAL CUNT if they were serious and not talented (!). Well I just got the new CD *I Like To Cuddle*. Songs like Kill the Bitch Who Bitches and Your Birthday Means Nothing To Me do a really good job of guaranteeing I don't crack the plastic wrapping, even if I do lose out on a jewel case.



FALCONER makes Jimmy cry. I mean really, *The Sceptre of Deception* is to Falconer as *Coming From the Sky* is to Keeper of the Seven Keys. Kristoffer Göbel sounds like Pasi Koskinen if Pasi was able to carry a tune. While Mathias Blad does do some backing vocals, it was his immaculate singing that carried the first two albums, and this new guy can't touch him Not close. Not that he's bad, but the uniqueness and majesty of the voice is not there, and that was a big part of LotFP = FALCONER support. The production is kind of weak (gets thinner every album), and the little folkly riffs are now really, really old. It's a FALCONER clone that should have popped up after 2001's debut. These songs are not exciting! (OK, the title track has lots of goodness, some daring, but is the lone exception and I miss Blad!) Not moving! Ahhhh! And the printing quality makes it look like a Leviathan Records graphic design job.



The problem with FINNTROLL's *Visor om Slutet* isn't anything that's on the actual CD, it's the fact that once again we have a band well known for their melding of wildly different musical styles (in this case, extreme metal and that Finnish folk polka stuff, whatever it is) separating those styles out and finding things just aren't as exciting when they do that. That, and it's pretty piss-poor to put a sticker that says "Special Price Acoustic Album" when it's EP length anyway, and is not acoustic.



I'm desperately trying to figure out why a band from Minnesota would go to Gothenburg to record *The Moment of Truth* in Studio Fredman. I'm sure if you take a minute, you can think of some pretty decent sounding albums that were recorded in the US. You can probably think of some nice sounding albums that were recorded in mainland Europe. All of which would be cheaper than going to Scandinavia to record an album. Most reviews I've seen of this album praise the band for their dedication in doing this... But all I'm thinking is that this was money tossed down the drain for social and/or marketing reasons, to be associated with the 'right' people. It is the only explanation.

If they had a pleasant vacation while there, more power to them, but the fact they went to Sweden to record doesn't make their boring music any more exciting and it doesn't make their derivative music any more authentic.



I have horns. I am a goat. Evil! Evil!  
Buy our album! Evil!  
Can I get a Mast head?

HORNED GOD proves with *Chaos, Bringer of All Revelations* that blasting for Satan is cool. Ha ha, I'm just kidding! They do prove that KRISIUN's formula of keeping a tight blast beat while some insane fuck does mindblowing solos will get anyone from Brazil a record deal though. All I can think of when listening to this is that HORNED GOD and SHAMAN need to swap singers for maximum metal goodness.



*Viva Emptiness* sucks. KATATONIA has gone off a cliff. This band's best work is and always has been *Brave Murder Day*. I didn't mind the move to clean vocals, and I even though *Last Fair Deal Gone Down* was a brilliantly bleak piece of work. Viva Emptiness sounds like these guys all sat around the rehearsal room, had no idea what they were going to do, but figured they needed a new album so decided to push the guitar up front and farted out some new material. Not hearing the emotion anymore. Thank you for my time.



How pathetic do you have to be that even the US won't let you in the country? Ask MARDUK (quack)! MARDUK (quack), Sweden's foremost long-gone-with-no-hope blastbeaters, return with another... um... album of (mostly) blastbeats. Sure, that and the black metal makeup make you cool with the kids, but is it any good? Actually, at eight albums and eleven years into a recording career, the cool kids are long gone anyway. That's OK guys, SKID ROW still releases albums, completely oblivious to the fact that their time in the trend sun has passed as well. And just a fashion tip from the ol' Jimster to the MARDUK (quack) boys: If you have a belly, make sure the bottom of your shirt overlaps in some way, shape, or form, with the top of your pants.



May I bitch for a moment? The new live DVD *Lamentations- Live at Shepherd's Bush Empire* is everything right and wrong with OPETH right now. First of all, it must be some sort of sick sick joke to call this thing *Lamentations* and then not include anything from before Blackwater Park. There really is no excuse. None. Every two bit band on

Earth with a live album reaches back across previous record label relationships when it comes to live albums, but when a band gets to a certain popularity, it seems that such things become more important because it's their money being spent to do so, instead of some mysterious future percentage they'll never see anything. Bad bad awful and just for the absence of anything from the first four albums, this thing should be boycotted. Not to mention that this thing focuses so much on the complete failure (artistically, anyway) of the whole Damnation/Deliverance idea. OPETH's entire strength was being able to meld influences once thought mutually exclusive. When they get it in their heads to try a double album, they separate out their elements and made two mediocre as hell albums. Deliverance was rehash and a half of their own work, and I don't even know what Damnation really was supposed to be. It was the horrible token light song they've had since My Arms, nine times over. Few of the ups or downs OPETH is known for, now predictably known for. Then they tour all special on that album, 'double sets', putting forth the idea that Damnation wasn't a 'real' OPETH album, but some sort of freak show that really doesn't count. I guess we'll see for sure with the setlists on tour after their next album. There is a documentary about the making of the D&D albums. Every time Åkerfeldt says they don't haven't rehearsed for albums in years, all I can think of is the diminishing returns in quality they're getting and the fact that the first two albums are the masterpieces that had four or five years of preparation put into them. Then they put poor Martin Mendez in front of a camera for an interview. The guy can hardly speak English. Just show him playing bass, or interview him in a language he can communicate in and subtitle the fucking thing. To whose benefit is it to make it look like he doesn't have the vocabulary of your average caveman? The most telling part of the documentary is the studio work where Mikael and Steven Wilson are interacting. Mikael's got this starstruck look on his face, like he just won a trip to Disneyland. Åkerfeldt really needs to disengage Steven Wilson from OPETH immediately because it really makes OPETH look (and sound) like shit when they put themselves, once the brightest shining light in metal, in a position to be following and idolizing a band as week as PORCUPINE TREE. It'd be less embarrassing at this point for Mikael to be writing songs to sound like Invisible Touch because he wanted to be like Phil Collins. I really don't know what happened to my once-favorite band. Maybe I changed. OPETH for sure changed. Trying to think of how they can be saved, I can come up with but one idea that seems remotely realistic: The introduction of Per Wiberg as a permanent member, and allowing him to open up the DEATH ORGAN bag of tricks in a writing capacity for OPETH. One can hope.



Richard Andersson present SPACE ODYSSEY's *Embrace the Galaxy*. Not that there's anything wrong with a keyboard playing doing his best do make an outer space cosmic consciousness album that sounds a lot like SYMPHONY X, but with keyboard wankery set to factor twelve. Yeah, nothing wrong with it, as long as I don't have to sit through it again. Sterile and so predictable it hurts!

## Strommoussheld

I'm an idiot. I fell for an advertising campaign! STROMMOUSSHELD's *Behind the Curtain* was marketing

as being inventive and doing things that other bands wouldn't dare. What I got was a mildly boring electronic metal album. LotFP is always full of bands that do what other bands don't dare to do, and this isn't it.



Is there anyone else disappointed that there aren't any mullets in the band photos inside WIDOW's *Midnight Strikes*? They try so darned hard to be 80s metal, and I think a mullet could be the missing ingredient that makes them tolerable. This should go over great with the Snakepit crowd. The problem with that here is, I only read Snakepit for the old bands.

El Hijo Del

## Grave Digger

VHÄLDEMAR's new album is called *I Made My Own Hell*, but they lied. They lied! They made mine! And when my girlfriend, who doesn't listen to one tenth of the power metal clones I do, hears two minutes of this and says, "They're using every cliché in the book!", well then, I just have to say, ARGH! Quote that one in the next album's press clippings. It sounds like a mix of GRAVE DIGGER and MANOWAR, but with a worse singer. To make things worse, there is an attempted epic song that contains the following spoken bit, about a magic bell: "If you play it, a brave sound can give you the power to rebirth and come back your brothers to the life and there will come your revenge." To have such a cliché and horrible, horrible band have a song called Breakin' All the Rules is fairly insulting as well. Death Comes Tonight is a metal anthem to insult all metal anthems ("Just metal! Just fight!! Souls burning! Look out! Just metal! Just fight!!") and the closer is I Will Raise My Fist, which is sure to terrify poseurs and real music listeners everywhere. Get this verse:

"People's loosing faith and walking blind  
While sun has fallen  
And darkness covers their lands  
Rain of poisoned waters turn my fields  
While fog's arrived  
And storm is beating my heart"

Yeah, raise that fist at that heartbeating storm, dude. And name the outro March of Dooms while you're at it, that'll impress people. This sucks the suck out of suck.

♂

So I see a lot of bitching arguing, and sniping about IRON MAIDEN's *Dance of Death*, DREAM THEATER's *Train of Thought*, and METALLICA's *St. Anger*. Who really gives a shit about IRON MAIDEN, DREAM THEATER, and METALLICA in 2003? I mean, really. Hang on to your memories of 1982, 1986, and 1992, respectively, and get on with your lives. This picking and moaning and debate... there's better, hungrier, more vibrant music out there. It surrounds us, but all the while we look to the bands that made us shiver years and years ago, forgive it even if we don't shiver, and are deaf to their growing inadequacies until they start hitting us over the head with a suck hammer. Support music, not brand names.