

And in the words of Shelter's Ray Cappo, "Here we go again!" Let's endeavour to keep this bit short and unpretentious. It's been over eighteen months since the last issue, and it's time to catch up. I might stress that the oldest material here is only a little more than a year old, not that this is satisfactory, but there's really no other way. This baby's had her troubles, and there have been times where I've considered throwing it all to hell, but somehow or other you've got the surviving threads before you. I think you will agree that while it's still far from perfect, especially as far as the aesthetics are concerned, but there has been a leap forward from the well-taken-but-fundamentally-flawed predecessor. Having tried to rectify the manifold mistakes of the second issue, you will notice the uniformity of font, scanned photographs, proper printing, shorter reviews and fewer inane interviewees. I'm not far off from being a perfectionist, so the relief of getting this issue out in the open does not entirely compensate for the many things that with more time I would have changed in the following sixty pages.

Some may think that my interview with Tom Reinders of Circle of Jormungandr (and indeed many of my other questions) goes against what I said in the editorial last time round. They'd probably be right, but I can change my mind if I so choose. Some people do have very strong ideas about what they think should be in an underground magazine, but at the end of the day it's my choice. Even bearing in mind the occasional rant, I have refrained from pushing anything in your face, ideologically-speaking. This isn't *Melody Maker*.

At the risk of sounding righteous, it's worth pointing out that, believe it or not, the number of bands interviewed here who record on Century Media isn't intentional. Many are (or were) great bands, and some of these weren't even on the label's books when I chose to feature them. Everything in my pages is the work of my hands, except the *Prophany* interview the late Oliver Jenkins gave me and the brief interviews with *Absu* and *Enslaved* which were kindly donated by Rosa Mayland. As has been pointed out, too many cooks badly spoil the last broth. For those who don't know, this is the last issue of *The Dead Sea*. Due to a variety of reasons I have disbanded the magazine, but may yet return to contribute something or other somewhere sometime in the future. Support all the magazines that are deemed worthy in the last few pages and you'll be doing the scene a good turn. Support good music, and never tire from opening your mind. The scene is still deeply underground in this country, so it needs attention. I never fail to smile whenever I read in the mainstream press that some form of trendy music is "underground", for the simple reason that underground music doesn't ever get in the press, at least for the right reasons. As someone or other said, our strength lies not in number, but in dedication and integrity.

Otherwise, thanks to my family and everyone who has helped in any way towards this project, including you! It's been three years since I started, so it has come to represent a stage of my life all in its own right. Now the time has come to spread my wings, so enjoy the ride while I go and oxidise the originals... #17

Contents:

Apologies for the lack of page numbers, but it was an insoluble last minute glitch. Hours of fun can be had carefully adding them with a felt-tip pen yourself!

4	Rotting Christ
6	Absu, Enslaved
7	Borknagar
8	Twin Obscenity
9	Ebonylake
11	Empyrium
13	Ulver
14	Arcturus
16	Limbonic Art
17	Einherjer
18	Acid Death
19	Thine
20	Sacramentum
21	The Circle of Jormungandr
22	Forlorn
23	Entwined
26	Septic Flesh
28	The Blood Divine
31	Prophany
32	Benighted Leams
34	Bal-Sagoth
36	Falkenbach
37	Ha Lela
39	Solefald
40	Music reviews
60	Magazine reviews

The Dead Sea Issue III

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One September evening at the Garage in London. The band onstage are certainly blessed with cult status, and they're pedigree is from the black metal scene too, so we should probably be even more humble. Without warning, they break into the song "Fgmenth, Thy Gift" and the whole place goes crazy. The song - whose title I had always imagined was due to a label's misspelling rather than Lovecraft - rocks like a bastard.

Of course, we're talking **Rotting Christ** and I'm initiating the construction of the third issue of this very magazine through a telephone conversation with the band's vocalist and guitarist Sakis on a particularly sunny day. Sakis would be used to that and was probably glad to be inside manning the phone. An Englander myself would far rather be outdoors, bar the obvious technical difficulties, so I had to content myself with sitting and watch the grass slowly bleach yellow. As I did, I wondered whether the reaction to the new album, *A Dead Poem*, had involved any accusations of softening their sound, and how had people taken it in general. "In the beginning, we were afraid that because of our change of style, many people would think that **Rotting Christ** had sold out, or stuff like that", Sakis opines before adding his opinion on why such accusations could be levelled. "The album, in spite of the fact that it's not fast and not brutal, you can feel this dark feeling, so the response until now is really encouraging. We have had a great response, I mean, we didn't expect to have such a nice response."

Indeed, one simple, clever but rather *deus ex machina* argument Sakis used in the past against the supposition that the band might have compromised their beliefs for Century Media was the fact that their logo is now more readable and hence more clearly blasphemous than ever!

The thing that impressed me most with the album is how epic parts of it are, such as "Out of Spirits".

"A lot of people like that song, yeah. The chemistry of this album is that it's not fast and it's not brutal, that was our goal."

Brothers in Arms

Changes have been afoot in the **Rotting** camp since the strangely subdued *Triarchy of the Last Lovers* album, not least the departure of Greek black metal godfather Jim Mutilator. So Sakis, why did he leave your company?

"He was really busy with his business and family, because he has two children, and so he couldn't follow the hard program of **Rotting Christ**. He couldn't practise a lot, he couldn't follow **Rotting Christ** in Europe, so he left the band in a very friendly way."

The replacement, Andreas, obviously seemed a natural choice:

"He was a friend of ours, I used to know him a lot in the past, and he's a really nice musician, really nice believe me. So he joined the band and he fits in, it works really fine."

Questioning about the band's new keyboardist, Panayotis, was hindered initially by my mispronunciation. Foolishly, I had trusted *Terraviva* magazine's typography, but I am told that he had been in the band since the early summer of 1997, and has fitted in comfortably. When *A Dead Poem* was recorded, the keyboard duties fell to the talents of **Samael's** Xy, but another development has been an additional six-stringsman. I asked Sakis if this had been a development that had been brewing for some time.

"He used to follow us in the past, on the two European tours, so he's now joined in professionally, he's a real member now, and he's a really nice guitar player. The most important thing now is that everyone in the band likes the music, and we have promised to ourselves to give one hundred percent of our lives to the band."

The band's accretion of two permanent members bucks one way of thinking within bands which says that extra bandmembers = extra problems. Sakis is of the opinion that shrewd leadership and organisation is the key to relieving friction within **Rotting Christ**. It seems that differences of opinion and infighting are no strangers to the band:

"To be honest, I'm not the kind of person who wants to hear the opinion of others", Sakis answers with no lack of aloofness, "I mean, if there are a lot of people in the band for sure you're gonna face a lot of problems, because everyone has their own ideas. So, there are a lot of fights between the bandmembers. But in **Rotting Christ**, I try to control everything, without this meaning that I am a dictator or something like that. When there are a lot of people, someone must be the leader, in order to avoid any fights. Until now, I have been the composer, so I am in control and we don't have any fights in the band, we don't have any problems. Now we are a five-piece band, we have a better live line-up."

And one which lends itself to more trouble-free gigging, I would imagine? Indeed the band could never use synth onstage previously. "Yes, you are right, everything is much, much better now, for example we played with **Megadeth** here in a festival and everything worked really nicely, because we are five people now and you can really work much better and try to create a better atmosphere."

Many other household names; **Moonspell**, **Bal-Sagoth** and **Misan-**

Rotting Christ

more years than most, and have had to cope with their fair share of problems. Has this professionalism led to the new logo and abandonment of pseudonyms, Mr. Necromayhem?

"I cannot say that because we have a different logo or use our accepted names, that

means that we are more professional. We are more professional because if you hear this album, with our previous album you can hear many more differences, in the sound production, in everything. We have worked a lot on this album, we have learned to work as professionals with Century Media. That was our goal, as a band, to record such an album."

Is Sakis then willing to backtrack and talk about the Osmose debacle then, you didn't enjoy that?

"Yeah, I know, I don't want to turn back on silly stories. As you remind me of this story with Osmose, do you think that Osmose is a professional label if you take a look at the *Thy Mighty Contract* album, you can see on the back six songs instead of eight or nine. That means you can look at a new band and tell they are unprofessional, I don't really know why. Maybe because they have the power to say shit about us."



throe to name a few, feature brothers in their line-ups. Does Sakis find it an advantage to be in the game with drummer and brother Themis, or is there further cause for conflict there? "It is easier. I mean, a lot of times you have problems because I think that everyone who has a brother has fights. I don't know if you've got any brothers?"

Yeah, but he's always been smaller than I have, so that tends to solve inevitable difficulties.

"Yes, I think brothers always have problems, so sometimes we have a lot of problems, but of course, if someone belongs in your own family, you don't have any real problems, just fights! Nothing else. But everything works fine because we can help each other better."

Sathanas Te Deum

Moving on to a consideration of the fourth album, I wondered just what the hell the syllogistic title was referring to. Sakis explains:

"*A Dead Poem* - we use it in order to create a better atmosphere. I can't say our music is life music, we don't want to follow any life forces or stuff like that, like a lot of bands follow. Our music is extreme, so we generally want this album to trick your mind in a nomadic journey, like a poem does, but not in a light way. So it's a dead one."

I suppose that's some twisted logic for some of you, but what will he say about the cover representation?

"It's a tragic figure, separated from the wall that surrounds him, a wall full of inscriptions. His eyes are blindfolded because he can't face all the things that are going to happen in the future. I tried to create a cover that represents **Rotting Christ's** music, by looking at the cover you can understand what **Rotting Christ** plays."

Perhaps that would be an overstatement, although there is that tragic element in *A Dead Poem* and, to a lesser extent, *Triarchy of the Last Lovers*. I would hope that Sakis' lot could face up to their future, unless Woodhouse Studios is giving them nightmares already. Would the vocalist say that his lyrics have evolved since the last effort? "Yes, the lyrics have changed a bit; not a lot, because they still deal with fantastic stories that used to be written in the past, but also they are dreamy. We tried something new on this album; we used some emotional lyrics about the dark side of the mind and stuff like that."

Are there any hints of Satanic/occult themes, as there were on the first releases?

"No, I cannot call our lyrics Satanic. We don't write Satanic lyrics."

Have you grown out of that then, or is it just a natural progression, rather than being more mature?

"I cannot say more mature because we never wrote lyrics like "I love Satan" or "We are Satan-worshippers" or stuff like that", he points out. "We've always wanted to have the artistic point of view of everything, the artistic side of these stories. On this album generally, **Rotting Christ** is not a Satanic band but we can't call ourselves atheists or humanists. Don't misunderstand us by reading **Rotting Christ** as another Satanic band who play very fast, very brutal stuff like that."

Understandably distancing himself from inane and fatuous 'Satanic philosophy' as espoused by many wannabes today, I asked Sakis how much maturity has affected the band, seeing as they have been around for

A raw nerve obviously, and at this point I brought up my feeling that many of the bands recording for the Beau-rainville record label aren't exactly the epitome of professionalism. Sakis was not concerned though:

"I don't care if it's professional or not, because the only thing that I care about is that I like the music. Of course, you have to work more like professionals, because it's not like the old glorious days of the underground, that everyone can do what they want. But now, things have changed a lot, and you have to be a bit professional in order to stand up for yourself."

The main gripe with Osmose was however most likely the lack of promotional push on what was an album with much potential.

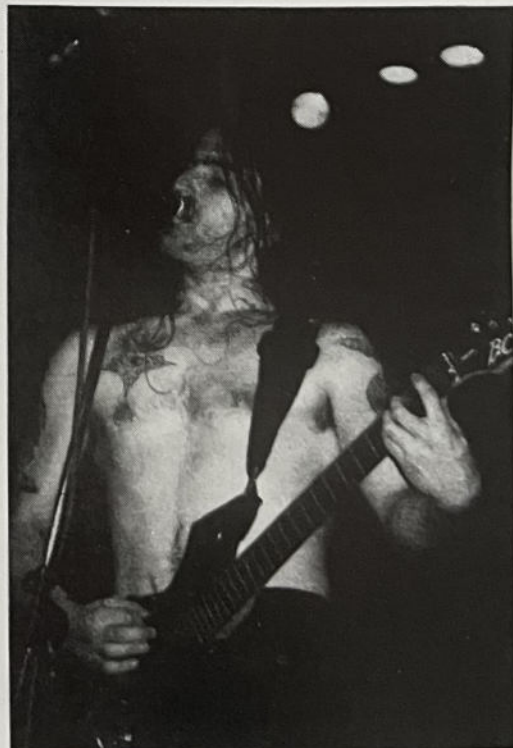
The song "Ten Miles High" is the first instrumental **Rotting Christ** song, why so?

"To be honest in the beginning this song was supposed to have lyrics", the man in black says, "but when we heard this stuff without lyrics I thought that it was better to leave it without lyrics, so we made it an instrumental."

Probably a wise philosophy that more bands could learn from. Sakis agrees that he loves **Samael's** *Passage*, but doesn't admit to that resulting in Xy being ushered into the production chair:

"No, we wanted someone who would know the music very well. He comes from the underground, all those days ago. We wanted someone who was a nice musician, who would have nice ideas, so we chose Xy from **Samael**, that's the only reason. We didn't want to sound like **Samael**, it's really stupid to make an album just to sound like another band. Of course, we've been around as a band for nine years, we have our own sound."

Out of interest, who produced the *Triarchy of the Last Lovers*



album, in Stage One studios, Germany?

"I did, almost!"

Almost?

"Yeah, almost. Together with a guy from Holy Moses."

I can't say I'm familiar with the band (popular in Deutschland I'm told), but the man in question was Andy Classen, and the distinguish-

countries tend to produce emotionally richer, slower strains of black metal, but Sakis does not think so:

"I cannot say that the temperature has anything to do with emotion, in my opinion. Of course, we are influenced by our ancient civilisation, in our everyday lives. We don't want to be another trendy band who use ancient mythology just to be cult.

We want our music to be world-wide, to be heard by everyone, not just because they are interested in the things we are writing about. World-wide, who's going to care if we write about Socrates and stuff like that?"

Now that's something coming from a band with broad ambition, note in particular the spurning of the cult status which, ironically, **Rotting Christ** quickly acquired in the early 1990s.

Let's get a little deeper into the compositional side of things. In *Isten* magazine you said that "a great riff was created with much concentration to yourself and the suitable surroundings". What are your preferred suitable surroundings?

"Self-consciousness. When you are creating a riff, it's not something that happens suddenly, you just play the guitar and maybe you can play for one day, or you can have nothing. It's something that comes from your heart, and you can't control it. So, self-consciousness is I think the best way."

King of a Stellar Whore

Rotting Christ, when they Euro-toured for a month with **Old Man's Child** and **Sacramentum** (with whom Sakis was not previously acquainted), came to England for their first time for the opening shows, why didn't they try earlier?

"We tried before to get the agency to book at least one show in England because we've always wanted to play there, but we had problems, I don't really know why. So now we are glad that at least we are going to play at least two shows there, it depends upon the reaction of the people, if the people like it then we will play there in the future or if not, OK."

You mean, if not, then no. I talked to Sakis after the London show, and it was hard not to confuse his tiredness with disappointment at an arguably lukewarm reception. He seemed to enjoy the reaction from the Bradford crowd anyhow. Personally, I would have thought it could be even better for a band this influential, but we English are a queer bunch, eh? But Sakis, why the problem with playing in England, is it really the extra money needed to cross the Channel?

"No, it's not extra money because if you are playing in Holland, it's very easy to reach the UK. I don't really know why, because metal music..."

Began in England?

"Yes, exactly, you prefer to listen to stuff like **Oasis** and stuff like this, I don't really know why."

I blame a general English lack of spirit in going against the grain and trying other forms of music and being open-minded.

It seems strange, or to be put more indignantly, absurd that you've played in Mexico but not England?!

"Yeah! And in Israel and Turkey, everywhere except England, it's impossible you know! But now we are going to play."

And play they did. When queried on the English scene, hopefully not just out of politeness, Sakis reveals admiration for both **Hecate Enthroned** and **Cradle of Filth**, referring to the latter specifically in defence of many more-underground-than-thou fans' attacks:

"I love it. I don't know if it's a rip-off, I only like a band for the music, I don't care if they are shitty persons or cool guys, I don't really give a shit. Just *Dusk...*, the last album of **Cradle of Filth**, I really like it, so I like the band."

You did the *Out of the Dark* festivals some time ago, were these the most important shows **Rotting Christ** have done?

"Something like that, I couldn't say that because we have played in other festivals, for example, we played with **Megadeth** here in Athens, we are playing again with **Venom**, here in Athens in September. So we've played a lot of times. But the *Out of the Dark* festivals were one of the best things we have done."

Were you well satisfied with your tracks on the *Out of the Dark* festivals (playing in Krakow, Poland in October 1996) CD?

"Yes, we were represented OK, it was our first thing for Century Media, and they don't expect so much because we are new on the label. From now on we will have a better representation I think."

Aficionados will notice that Sakis neglected to sing the song title in the wonderful chorus of the song, "King of a Stellar War" in that performance.

"We always want to make some changes to the song, so we made the change like that, but from now on we are going to sing the chorus."

He agrees with me that the song works better with the line intact.

At the present time, Sakis is in no mood for his own side-projects (in the past he has worked with **Thou Art Lord**), unlike many of his black metal friends, but he doesn't feel they are spreading themselves too thinly.

"I'm 100% concentrated on **Rotting Christ**", the man says.

"If you have time, why don't you

play in some other kind of music, because music is our life and we want to express ourselves through it. But now I'm so fucking busy with **Rotting Christ**, it's really hard to find time to have a project."

Rotting Christ, Sakis implores me, will not be using their girlfriends/wives/sisters/concubines/groupies as vocalists on the next record, does it strike him as too trendy?

"Yes, exactly, **Rotting Christ** don't want to be trendy. It wouldn't fit well with **Rotting Christ**'s music. **Rotting Christ**'s music is really extreme, we don't sing about flowers."

I never knew exactly what it was with the hostility towards the band **Immortal**, I think it was to do with antagonism on the *Fuck Christ* tour, but Sakis couldn't clear the skeletons from his closet:

"I don't care about this band! I don't want to talk about it. I prefer people to listen to other black metal bands." The man has however admitted in the past that the whole tour was a great mistake: the use of two stranger-to-the-band session musicians, the lack of live experience, and the total lack of common grounds with either **Immortal** or the other band **Blasphemy**.

As one of the pioneers of the present generation black metal sound, would you say that black metal is definable in 1997?

"Black metal is now a bit commercial I think, but of course only the true are going to survive, I mean the people that think that black metal is the most brutal music. A lot of black metal bands are going to split up, I think."

In a sentence though, what is black metal?

"This is really difficult. What black metal is? It's another kind of excellent music that fits well in the '90s and is going to disappear really soon. But metal itself as a label is going to survive."

How the Lads

It's time for a sidetrack. Let's ask the singer his views on the beautiful game. "Yes, I'm really into football, I support AEK Athens. I support Newcastle now, but I have always supported Manchester United. Always. I support Newcastle because one player of ours - Temuri Ketsbaia - went there [on a free transfer], and I'm really a fan of English football."

Ketsbaia was probably the only good thing for Newcastle United in the '97-'98 season, so Sakis' favourites didn't reap the goods that year. Sakis is obviously clued up on the English football situation:

"I know everyone from the Premier League. I always support Manchester United, it's my team." You either love them or you hate them.

"Yeah, I know a lot of people hate them!"

Unfortunately, like the *Toon Army*, they won fuck all the last season too, I only hope Sakis' band gets rewarded more richly than his footballers of choice! At the time Sakis was not too hopeful on Greece's World Cup '98 qualification hopes, not expecting them to get to the second round even if they were to qualify.

"We have a lot of good players but it's really hard to 'fix' them as a team because Greek people always argue between themselves, we are really strange people, so we can't fix a really nice team."

Sakis tells me that the police brutality towards fans I had been informed about is merely a reflection of the fans' aggression; something that we tend to think of as an English problem.

Putting my final question to Sakis, I asked him what the most satisfying aspect of ten years of **Rotting Christ** had been?

"Just because we're playing the music, nothing else, the music is satisfaction itself, so we satisfy ourselves by playing music. We don't have something special to say about this. A lot of silly things have happened to us but I don't regret anything." Good for him.

Sakis and company returned to the studio after some Brazilian dates, and the new material has been described as "more brutal and mature". Expect a new **Rotting Christ** release in early 1999.



ing feature of that album was Sakis' poor vocals, which are much less venomous than on the current album. The man at least has an excuse that's unusual enough to be plausible:

"It was really bad, because I had measles, at twenty-five years old! At the time I was recording the album I had measles and I really couldn't sing in the way I wanted. So it was impossible to come back to Greece and then return to Germany after such a period and record them again. So I had to record the vocals when I had measles, that was the only problem I had. I don't like them very much, I prefer the sound of the ones on the last album."

At least the album had 'analogue' drums for the first time ever, eh?

In the last issue of this fanzine, Efthimis from **Nightfall** blamed Greek bands' often pisspooor productions on sound engineers with bad attitudes, and Sakis is compelled to agree.

"Yes, that is right, because the people here don't know what exactly a Death/Black Metal band want to have as their sound. So, yeah, he's right."

Let's recap on some of your previous albums, going back to the time of *Non Serviam*, the only CD you recorded for Unisound Productions. Produced in the now defunct Storm Studios, said album, Sakis agrees, suffers from the weakest sound (much worse than *TMC*, which was produced in Molon Lave Studios), but the greatest problem the lads had was with their adopted label.

"The only problem", the vocalist begins, "was that this fucker from Unisound Records didn't pay any money for the recording, didn't pay any money for advertising, didn't pay any money for anything so this album was a step down for us."

His opinion on the actual music of *Non Serviam* has evidently been marred by the bad vibes:

"I really like the songs but not the sound. It really had a bad story with Unisound."

Sakis may even be playing down the Unisound thing a bit, since there were reliable rumours to the extent that **Rotting Christ** were so appalled by the label that they fell prostrate before both **Misanthropy Records** and **Century Media**, begging to be signed. Complicating the issue is the fact that bandmembers were working for the label previously. Whence did the title of that album come from, it's Latin for "I will not serve", if I'm correct?

"Yes, exactly. I don't really know why we chose it now, because I didn't choose the name for this album!"

Fair enough, but who did?

"Jim. Jim Mutilator. Now he's out of the band, I don't really know how to answer."

I read a short story titled *Non Serviam* in a collection of philosophical essays, in which two aliens were debating human theology, and they reasoned that even if God were to exist, there was no rational basis for believing in him, and therefore worshipping him. Sakis believes the album title has more directly Satanic connotations:

"Yeah, maybe it's something like the first angel to be sent out of Paradise, saying to God, 'Non serviam.'" Indeed, the lyrics of the song include a Latin passage, but I haven't done that subject for years and I'll pass on a translation.

I had a tape-trader once who helped me out on previous issues of the fanzine, and he had a magical touch. Everything he seemed to copy me was thrilling, *Thy Mighty Contract*, five or so years old now, being no exception. The sheer drive of parts of this full-length debut kicked me hard, but it was the mix of melody with in-your-face aggression that was most effective.

"A lot of people like it", Sakis joined me in my memories, "It was something of a cult album; it belongs to the second generation of black metal albums, and a lot of people still like it very much. When we are playing live, they ask us to play songs from that album, they really like it very much even now."

For a debut album, it's certainly very capable.

"It's really strong, yeah."

Are you planning to play songs from that album when you come to London?

"Of course, yeah, two or three songs." In fact Sakis and company only aired *The Sign of Evil Existence* with the aforementioned *Fgmenth*, *Thy Gift*, when they did the London show, if I recall correctly. Anyway, at least Century Media saw sense to re-release the album with the tracks from *The Mystical Meeting* tacked on.

Socratic Intervention

One wonders whether there is any truth in the hypothesis that hotter





Let's get back to the Q & A format for old times sake, shall we? **Absu** and **Enslaved** were both given a quickfire post-gig questioning session. Fast and furious action with these Osmose favourites. Go!

Who the hell are Absu, Proscriptor?

"**Absu** was formed in 1989 when we recorded under the name **Dolmen**, which is an ancient standing monument. Then in 1991, for the love of Sumerian and Mesopotamian mythology, we decided to change the name to **Absu**, for the love of the theology and philosophy behind the book *The Necronomicon*, which was written by Azif. We released three albums, two 7"s, one video and we did three tours, and this is where we stand."

From whence cometh the name?

"It's the divinity of the netherworld ocean, it was also the allied sister of Mumuti. Since **Absu** means 'netherworld ocean' or 'abyss' in Sumerian and Mesopotamian mythology, we thought that this would be the best name for this cult band."

Why the attraction to Sumerian and Mesopotamian mythology?

"We are all interested in those mythologies because this race of human manifestation has the first recorded and historical philosophies and theologies. Our music has nothing to do with politics or society. **Absu** only deals with our ancestral heritage and ceremonial magic, so the Sumerian and the Mesopotamian mythology is what we were most enthralled with at first."

What is the Absu stance on occultism?

"Well, the most occult things we practise are Kabbalah, divination and tasseomancy."

In the Kabbalah there are 72 demons and 72 angels. Do you invoke them?

"Hmmm, I invoke the demons that are within myself and the demons that are within the golden dawn of Kabbalah. Slaine who later turned out to be Cernunnos, the Celtic god of the earth."

What do you think about American society?

"I don't think about it whatsoever. I mean, there are a few chosen bands which are very good and with whom we share a brotherhood. That country is so big that it is very hard to find a true culture and ancestral heritage within, so **Absu** do their own thing. Ceremonial magic and ancestral heritage are the most important aspects behind the philosophy of the band."

But isn't your music a reaction against the typical American mentality?

"No, it has nothing to do with that, **Absu** is mainly about our ancestral pride. I come from Scottish descent, Shafiel and Equitant



come from Irish descent. We take that and use analogies with the Sumerian and Mesopotamian mythologies. So, what we are doing is that our spirits transcend from one past soul into another, we think that our magical heritage is the most important aspect within **Absu** itself."

What do "normal", average people think about such an enigmatic band as Absu, what is their reaction to the kind of music you play?

"Back to when the band started, a lot of people didn't know what we were doing or didn't know what the philosophy of the band was. But the way that scene has developed, I hate to say, black metal has become more of a trend in the US now, and it's like a lot of human beings are starting to open their eyes to realise that extreme music is becoming very strong in the USA. This is the reason why I'd like to say that **Absu** has a strong starting point. As for average people, as far as the band is concerned, I totally avoid "normal people" as much as I can. I mean, the people that are in **Absu**, I can totally communicate with them and acknowledge them, but the "normal" people, like you were saying, I totally ignore them, that's for sure."

Could you explain why the sound on your second album *The Sun of Tiphareth* is worse than on your first album *Barathrum V.I.T.R.I.O.L.*?

"It's just because the recording equipment which we used on *The Sun of Tiphareth* was about 35 years old. Well, initially we wanted to get an old analogue non-digital sound for that album and unfortunately, the overall production wasn't what we had expected. Anyway, we did the best that we could with what we had to work with."

Why didn't Inferno play tonight?

"Well, last night the show was in Vienna and the drummer Necrodevil had to leave because of his job! That's the reason why **Inferno** didn't continue the tour for the rest of all the performances, so it's basically up to the drummer of **Inferno** why they didn't continue this tour with us."

What did you think of the gig you played tonight?

"The audience was very decent, it was very responsive even if the overall production could have been a bit better. With the co-operation of the audience, it made up for the sound that was enhanced within the stage. Actually, it is the second time we have come to Europe, but it's our first time we got to play in Switzerland and we are all enjoying it very much."

Final comments?

"I hail the Swiss fans and all those worldwide. Remember that your only existence lies within yourself! Worship **Albal**!"



Why did you choose the name Enslaved, Grutic?

"Actually some of our friends suggested that we called our band **Enslaved** and so I thought that this name fitted to our concept really well. **Enslaved**, like to be enslaved in nature."

When did you start being interested in the Vikings and their mythology?

"Since I was a little kid. I don't remember when, but I can say it was many years ago..."

And what does Viking mythology represent for you?

"It represents all the essences and all the powers of nature. It surrounds everything."

As a Norwegian, how do you view the rest of Europe?

"I see the rest of Europe in a slightly different way. Our mentality is a little different. Actually, Europeans are all different when it comes to their mentality, attitudes etc. People are not the same according to where they live."

What kind of relation did you have with Euronymous?

"He was a big friend of ours, he also was the boss of our first record label. We were close friends with him."

What do you think of the Mayhem reformation?

"Nothing! It's not my business to abuse on such things! If they want a reunion, fine by me. It's not like I don't care much about them, but it would never be the same without Euronymous."

Did you listen to Emperor's new CD? What did you think?

"Yeeeahh! I have been listening to it!!! I find it good, except from the last song which I don't like at all. I really enjoy the first tracks."

What's your opinion on Osmose Productions, your present label?

Osmose is a great label, it's the best one we could have found. They don't rip people off and they are always honest to us. We all think that Osmose is an excellent label. Actually, we have just signed, a couple of months ago, for two more albums."

Why didn't you tour with Immortal, as they released their album at the same time as you did and as they are friends of yours?

"Yes, they are our friends, but we are not touring with them because we are with **Absu**! It's as simple as that. Anyway, the **Immortal** tour has been cancelled."

What do you think about the present underground scene?

"Well, some bands are good and others not. There are too many bands around. Too many people have a band, release a demo, get a shitty record deal and record a shitty album. There are too many bands which have a lack of quality and that is very sad. It was better years ago, or even ten years ago."

Why don't you use keyboards while playing live?

"It's not necessary to use a keyboard during our gigs because it doesn't sound that good when it's played live. The reason is that either it's too high [in the mix] and it disturbs everything or the keyboard is too low and has no effect. So, that is why we prefer to use no keyboards when we are on stage."

Weren't you a bit disappointed with the rotten sound tonight?

I could only hear my voice and a little bit of drums, the rest I couldn't hear at all! That's normal you know."

And what did you think about the crowd?

It was really good, the Swiss crowd were excellent. Good,

considering that it was the first time we played in Switzerland."

Do you make a living out of music or is that impossible for you considering the high cost of living in Norway?

"No, it's impossible in Norway as everything is so fucking expensive. The money we get from Osmose Productions isn't enough to live from, so we have to work."

Is Viking mythology just a way to talk about Norway or is it rather to talk about Vikings? Is it like national pride?

"Yeah, we do actually sing about national pride as well, like about our ancestors and everything which deals with them. Most of our lyrics deal with the religious stuff, about the gods, their powers, and the powers of men. I'm an Odinist, so that aspect has a great importance in our songs. Each god represents a different kind of power. For example, Odin represents wisdom and might. Wotan the protecting force, represents war, but also strength and pride. Heimdal represents fertility, Fregal represents love, and Loke, humour etc., etc. You can go on like this for hours. The Loke force is necessary to get a balance; it can be evil. Like the Loke force can drive you to evil acts, but it can also drive you to good acts."

What do you think about Helheim from Norway, who tend to copy you a lot?

"I've never heard of them. Never!"

You're a big liar!

"I have heard about them actually, but I say I have never as I don't want to speak about them."

Evidently this diplomatic approach can only go so far. Like as far as the borders of Norway. Sometimes life on the road means you've got to resort to karate-kicking a **Kataklysm** member in the head, haven't you?



So, England's "most frightening band", **Iron Monkey**, don't seem to be able to cope with the sheer stress of fanzine editors haranguing them backstage for interviews. Are they tough guys or what? Jonny Morrow excuses their trashing of a London club on the basis that "there were so many fuckin' knobheads backstage, fucking asking stupid questions." Further in that *Terrorizer* interview (issue 57), drummer Justin Greaves continued with, "doing their little fucking 'zines and that". Interesting to learn that these guys blame and deprecate people who are interested in supporting their music, and that it is these people who are asking stupid questions. Why then lads, did you allow them in to do the interview? Why didn't you trash them instead? I think it says something for their music to which these stupid 'zine editors are attracted. Needless to say, this "little fucking 'zine" will not be asking "fuckin' stupid questions" to **Iron Monkey**. They seem far, far too scary for that.

Passing through London's Embankment tube station one morning, I picked up a copy of *The Guardian's* Friday review pull-out and stumbled across an article by a GLR (Greater London Radio) DJ about the *Kerrang!* awards. Sean Hughes, the writer in question, treated the subject light-heartedly enough for me to avoid having a complete sense of humour bypass, but although he avoided trotting out the most obvious clichés of metal fans being dirty, stupid bastards, there were annoyances that deserve rebuke. Firstly, there was the observance that his "metal friend...regularly hangs out at roadworks because he thinks the pneumatic drill has a good beat". Amongst other silly and patronising comments, Hughes wrote that *Kerrang!* had been trying to persuade the general population that metal "has moved on from spandex trousers, sexist humour and long hair". Now, whilst I'd totally agree that *Kerrang!* long stopped promoting anything vaguely metal - and indeed perusal through the rag recently have shown that radical haircuts are being encouraged - there are problems here. From a newspaper seeking to root out inequality wherever it is imagined to be, the gender stereotyping here is astounding. Firstly, and arguably more forgivably, comes the assumption that metal is appreciated by men only; and secondly, the generalisation that long hair is necessarily solely suitable for females. Both are quite unforgivable examples of bigotry and I will expect *Guardian* high command to take action! As for sexist humour, metal (at least beyond utter shite like **Mötley Crüe**) has nothing that remotely compares to the sexism of the American gangster rap scene, but of course that's alright because **Snoop**, **Cyprus Hill** and company aren't white and are socially excluded, eh? At least Hughes had the sense to applaud Dani and company for accepting their award for Best Live Band from it-girl Tara Palmer-Tomkinson with the words: "Tara, your column is rubbish and your dress is cheap". Nice one guys.

The debut offering of **Borknagar** being the steamhammer it was, I decided to have a chinwag with the man with the long blond hair. The interview dates back to the autumn of 1997, at the time the band had just released *The Olden Domain* on Century Media Records (bearing in mind that by now the band have a third album out). Something of a tame affair, in comparison to its predecessor it has to be said, but what did Øystein Brun gauge the general reaction as. Encouraging?

"Well yeah, I guess so. So far I've done something like 45 interviews and the response has been really great, overwhelming actually. I think also the future response will be."

The new bassist Kai was obviously a natural choice, although he's not your average Elm Street superstar. Øystein explains: "Well, he doesn't actually have a black metal or metal background; he is actually just a guy we picked up from the streets. It was actually our drummer [Grim once of **Gorgoroth**] who has known him for ten years. We wanted to get a new bass player, so we talked with him and he seemed to be the perfect guy for the job, and well, he really was. He has a little bit different influences but I think that's great, in order to get that special touch in our music."

So what influences did the new man bring?
 "He's into all the stuff like **Black Sabbath**, and all other bands from this period of time; the '70s."

How about you, I guess you listen to other types of music which are not related to metal at all?

"Hmm, that's right, I listen to quite a lot of different kinds of music, everything from... well, quite a lot of **Pink Floyd**, I like that. I listen to everything, classical music a lot, I've got a lot of classical music on CD."

I ask because on a lot of the newer songs you can detect influences which are quite different from your average metal band, some of the rhythms and atonal sections, for example.

"Yeah, I'm influenced by everything, I like not just to listen to music but to experience music and to dedicate myself to music, so I'm quite open-minded."

Grimland Domain

Mr Brun obviously didn't want to give people preconceptions with the nascent **Borknagar** project. Aside perhaps from giving it a funny name, rumoured to be from a place in Scotland.

"No. It's actually just a fantasy name that I made up in my head, and that was maybe a part of the intention; I wanted to get a name that didn't refer to anything special. When people hear the name they only get one association, and that's the band."

Many believe that Century Media channels bands into sounding a certain way. Let's try for an honest answer from the man: in changing from Malicious to Century Media Records, was there any pressure at all from the label to style any aspects of the band's sound?
 "No, not really. I mean, people had told me that Century Media is a big label and I heard rumours about all the bands having pressure and have to do things that the label say. But for us, that has nothing to do with it, I mean, we decide everything, we produced the album ourselves. I feel that this album sounds very much like how I had tried to get it to sound. So I feel that we are free to do anything, and we won't stop. We also did all the concept on the inlay and stuff like that, so it's totally our thing."

Nevertheless, the music seems rather more refined and less aggressive the second time around, as a whole.

"Well, yes that's right, but I think when this album is aggressive it is even more aggressive than the first. It's more happy, I like the vocals better and it's a better combination. When it is angry, I think it is really angry."

Part of the reason why I asked whether any pressure had been put upon you was that I noticed the vocals, and all but one of the songtitles were in English.

"That was actually a thing I wanted to do because I did the lyrics for the first album in Norwegian. I mean, Norwegian is not a language of music, that was a thing I experienced when I did it, I wanted to try it. It was for me a natural thing to go back to English. I used to play in a death metal band called **Molested**, and I did English lyrics then as well. So, I felt I wanted to do it."

Do you find it more of a challenge to express the lyrical ideas through a language that is not your natural language?

"I think basically that with the English language you can elaborate, it's a lot bigger than Norwegian. I'm not the best in English, but I feel it's a lot better to express my feelings and what I want in English. It's also easier I think, they have a lot more words for everything. I think, for me, it's a fact that the English language is the language of music, so I just faced the fact"

And are the lyrics a continuation of the themes expressed on the debut album, a logical continuation? Has there been any evolution?

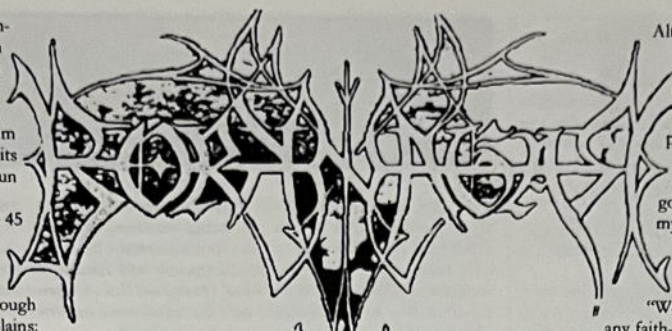
"Well, I think the lyrics on this album go a little bit deeper. I mean the title *The Olden Domain*, it's not referring to any special place, or something like that, it's more referring to a secret spot in the bottom of the soul. I mean, it's much more related to feelings and moods and atmospheres."

From the title I assumed it was just referring to the olden times - is this the case?

"Hmm, yes. Well, my intention with this title was to do something referring to something within. It's based on feelings for me basically. Also my lyrics are written in a way that people will get some different associations and feelings towards and I guess that's also the intention with the lyrics. I just present the kind of art and it's up to the fans, people and journalists to get their own view. I mean, I don't have any special meaning in the lyrics, I don't want to tell people what to think and what to believe."

What does the symbol on the CD represent, you also used it on the inlay of the debut?

"The dragon? I don't have any special background for this, it was



more like I wanted to have a kind of slogan for the band, or a second logo, so to speak. It's taken from an old book dealing with Norse mythology and it's by an old artist who drew it 500 years ago. I thought that it was fitting to the concept, and that's the basic idea behind it."

The Olden Domain was produced in Woodhouse Studios in Germany and has a very clear production. It's always struck me as mad that black metal bands often go for a bad production, given the importance of the musical power and focal aggression. Do you see it as an attempt to stay underground or is it something to do with hiding bad musicianship?



"Well I don't know, I guess it's sometimes a kind of combination. I mean, when we did the sound on this album we had to work exactly, because the sound is really clear and there is no space for wrong playing and stuff like that. It's a very honest sound-picture, I think. So, I guess when bands do use a bad sound maybe they somehow cover over their mistakes. I don't think the intention with this band's sound is to cover the professionalism. For me, if a band wants bad sound, they want it to sound very wild. I did it on the first album, but I thought for me it was a kind of progression, I wanted to do the second album with a killer sound, really to get my music through. The music is, in my eyes, so good that a good sound is needed to express the mood."

What do you think of the production on the last **Ulver** album then?

"Well, I mean, it's a good concept but I don't like that album that much."

On the Winterway

The debut CD you recorded at Grieghallen, but I still thought it had a pretty good production - how satisfied are you with that production?

"Well, we actually worked quite a lot at the mixing of that album. It's a good and interesting album I think, somehow. I mean, some of the songs were written in '94 or '93, it's all old stuff and I've changed and got better as a musician. I think it's a cool album but, well, it's something from the past."

Indeed it is a 'cool' album, overflowing with confident ideas and breathtaking intensity that came as an antidote to the stale extremity of the mid-90s black metal scene. Were you surprised at how quickly people began to like what you were doing and the speed at which word got around about the band?

"Yes, it's really amazing, things have gone really fast. I mean, we started the band in the middle of '95, May I think, and well certainly, two years later we're on Century Media. I mean, Woodhouse Studios recording and stuff like that, so the progression on a commercial level has been really, really amazing."

Going back to the first album, after you'd done that were there any particular things you wanted to improve upon?

"Well basically I wanted to get a really killer sound-picture. Actually, my intention was to go to Woodhouse even before we got signed to Century Media, it was at least a dream for me to record an album which would really sound killer on all levels. I mean, somehow albums that have Woodhouse productions

sound 'cute', but I think I felt it was necessary for me in order to be satisfied with the product; to get it clean, but somehow at the same time sound really heavy and have an in-your-face sound."

Do you know how many copies of the first album were sold?

"Well, I'm not sure, I've heard something like eleven or twelve thousand, and that's cool, but Malicious haven't done - as far as I know - any promotion. Myself, I've only seen one ad. in one magazine and that's all. It's difficult because that album does have bigger potential, but well, such is life. But I guess things will be better now with Century Media."

Still, that must have been one of the biggest sellers on Malicious, so there's not a lot to whinge about.

One song on the latest album is called "Om Hundrede Aar er

Alting Glernt". What kind of ideas were you trying to evoke with this song?

"Well, this song is an instrumental which is basically done by Ivar, our synth player (he also plays in **Enslaved**) and it's part of an old Norse poem. I think the song is quite personal for him, but I think it fits into the concept. In English it means, "In a Hundred Years Everything is Forgotten", and it has something to do with Norse mythology and stuff like that, it fits into the concept of this album."

So, does it refer to the old pagan heritage being lost, or what?

"Well no, not really. I mean, I don't think it refers to any faith-system actually, it's more to do with feelings and thoughts, a little bit more philosophical I think. The real meaning behind this song I'm not sure of, but it fits the idea behind it."

Have **Borknagar** been satisfied to spread through word of mouth because it seems that there has been a low profile to the band. Is this because other members have other bands and this is more of a side-project?

"Well I think it's not any kind of side-project anymore, things have developed very much in the last year, so to speak. I started out in '95 as a solo project, I had the intention of making some music of my own and I just happened to have a drummer to do all the drums, but things have developed and on the second album we had a lot of different members from all these bands. On this album we have got a new bass player and I feel the line-up has got a lot steadier lately. I feel just now that the most unstable guy in the band is Garm, because he's in two more bands and doing a lot of musical stuff and whatever. We also have Ivar who plays in **Enslaved**, and he spends a lot of time with his band doing rehearsals and work on songs and stuff like that, so things are working really great. Things have developed much more and I don't like people calling it a project. I hope that people in the future will focus more on the music and what we're doing."

Do you see any limit as to what **Borknagar** can do considering that Garm and Ivar are both in well-established bands?

"Well, I'm not sure, I basically don't have any limits. I don't do things that I don't want or can't stand totally behind. I think the band will grow, I mean we have quite a strong album out now and we are on Century Media and we have already started to work on the third album, which will be in my eyes much better than the second one. So I think we at least have the potential to become quite a strong name in the underground. I don't want to say that we'll become a big band or a small band or something like that. I don't care too much really because I'm really satisfied with the situation now; we have a good label at our back, and we are able to do quite a lot of things with the music and stuff, to me that is satisfying. If we sell 100,000 albums or 20,000 or 10,000 it's not the most important thing, the music is."

On the debut album, what was going on in the background of the song "Nord Naagauk"?

"Hmm, that one. Actually we did some samples from a Norse movie, a Norwegian/Swedish movie actually. It was actually an opening for the movie, we sampled the sound from this movie and it fits perfectly."

You basically stated that **Borknagar** play 'epic metal', is this a distancing away from black metal?

"Well, we don't want to actually distance ourselves from black metal, but I wanted to make a point that we don't play black metal. I mean, to describe the music in the best way I think it's better to say a kind of epic metal, because the approach of both the lyrics and the music doesn't have much in common with black metal. I mean we have the moods and stuff like that but I think in general it is more towards an epic direction of music. I find it natural, but it's not that we dislike black metal, it's more to show what we are doing."

Do you think that the epic direction is one which more and more black metal bands are going in for nowadays?

"There seems to be a kind of change in the scene; there are a lot of bands doing '80s thrash/death metal stuff, and some are progressing more into the epic stuff. I don't know, it seems like for me this is a time for change, you can see new bands coming out with good sound, it seems like the level of the bands is increasing a lot."

Symbols and Signs

Even those who have never visited Norge will have heard about the wonderful scenic vistas on offer, but it's often doubtful whether some Northern bands who rabbit on about it in interviews actually care. So what extent is the music you create influenced by nature, landscapes and your physical environment?

"Well, I think not directly. I don't know, it's hard to say, I don't know what exactly influences me most. I mean, of course, nature and elements like that I guess have a quite big (maybe not direct) impact on me, but it's been important for me all my life. We use quite a lot of time on nature and stuff like that so I guess it is important."

Would it matter if you'd never seen a fjord or a mountain plateau first-hand though? Would you say that any of your



compositions are influenced only by your emotions without any reference to external surroundings?

"Oh, I think as I said a few minutes ago, I can't point my finger at something concrete that influences me. I mean, I get influenced by everything in life, from my job to music, everything. There is no sun without a shadow and I get somehow experiences and influences from everything. I can become a little more creative when I'm in a special mood, take a trip to the mountains and stuff like that, but I can't find any concrete things."

Borknagar's line-up features many 'star names' of the Norwegian scene. Are you surprised at how well everyone has slotted into the band and have worked so well together?

"Well, so far I've done all the music, all the lyrics, and the basic arrangements so there haven't been any conflict. But I mean, things have developed a lot, the whole band is rehearsing quite often, working on new songs and stuff like that, so things have stabilised a little bit. We have learnt to work together and so I think all the guys are into the music and the concept of the band, so it's quite natural. These days there are only Garm and Ivar who are involved in other bands, so I am *only* in this band, the drummer is *only* in this band, and the bass player is *only* in this band, so it's more like things are more stable these days, things go perfectly."

At the time of interview, **Borknagar** were supposed to be preparing to go touring. We know what happened, and the guitarist had his doubts even back then.

"We have some problems with this so I'm not sure what's really going to happen. So I can't say too much on this, I'm not sure. But it would be our first time on the road and I mean, this band hasn't played together before but of course the other members have different bands and I myself have done live shows before, so I think we're experienced enough to do a proper show, it would be nice. At least there will be some tour at the end of the year, but just now we have some minor problems."

What opinion do you have on fellow countrymen and labelmates, **Old Man's Child**? Do you like their new album?

"Well actually I haven't heard it yet, I was supposed to ask Century Media if they can send me the CD but the first album was really, really good, so I expect something good from them. I heard the response was really good to the album, I look forward to it."

Does your live performance entail all the keyboards?

"Yeah, of course. When we're doing it live, well, we will try to do it as close as possible to the album. I mean, we are going to use a session guitarist and we are going to use synths and sampling and all that stuff so I think somehow we will manage to create their sound as well, not as the album of course but something like it."

On the inlay of the first CD there was a disclaimer proclaiming **Borknagar** to be a band concerned with the ancient past, what do you think is the most important lesson modern man has to learn from the time when man had to respect nature to survive?

"Well, I don't think I have a special message, something concrete really, but it's somehow what I'm missing today. I want maybe with my band to kick some dignity back into people. I mean, there are so many jerks around and bullshit everywhere. We present a kind of moral sometimes and I want to kick some people in the ass, get in their face, there's so much shit going on. It's not a message or something like that, just part of our expression."

Asking you, do you see the Norse gods as symbolic or archetypal? A lot of people in the scene seem almost to believe in the material reality of the Norse pantheon...

"Oh no, for me it's quite symbolic, but I think what these symbols represent are very close to my thoughts and ideas. I feel it's something quite sentimental for me with the lyrics. I'm very much into it but I don't actually believe in all these gods, more to put names on the forces of nature. It's symbolic."

An interview I read with Svithjod of **In the Woods...** pointed out that so many of the bands are abusing the mythology and making it look ridiculous.

"Yeah, that's right, I mean there are a lot of bands who combine Satanism and Norse mythology, and also the Norse mythology with neo-Nazism and stuff like that, and it's crap, it's bullshit. To me, Norse mythology has nothing to do with any other religion or belief. It's crap, those bands just make a fool of themselves, at least, for people who know what is really the case."

Molesting the Dead

Borknagar are going famously, could you ever imagine yourself still playing in **Molested**?

"No, no, I quit the band early in 1995. One of the reasons why I started the **Borknagar** stuff was that I was tired of this death metal stuff, and I wanted to do something new. I left the band, and the band is now history anyway. I was much younger when we did this band so I was a bit inexperienced. We had a great time doing it but it's over now. It was cool because it was very energetic and fast and blasting. It was cool to play it live, it was very aggressive music."

What new tunes are flying around inside your head?

"Yeah, we have some ideas that we are doing, we have started on two songs. This second album will show very much the direction of the band and I think the next album will be the same way but a lot better and a lot more epic, a lot more bombastic and a lot more everything."

Still, don't expect total synthesiser-overkill, as Øystein says:

"That's right, I mean black metal bands these days use the synth as something in order to sound very special, but I mean the synth is just one of the instruments and for us it is very natural to keep the synth in a natural position in the sound-picture. This is what we want it to sound like, we're not a synth-based band at all, we use synth as an element in order to get through the atmosphere."

Many of those bands don't even offer any leads from the guitars. "Yeah, you don't hear the rhythm guitar, just some drums and you have enormous synths with big reverb, it doesn't sound impressive really. It gets kind of stupid, it's too over-dimensional I think."

The wise and soft-spoken man couldn't be more correct.

Twin Obscenity

Ate Wiig, mastermind behind **Twin Obscenity**, answered some questions I put to him after being impressed with the *Where Light Touches None* debut CD. In the meantime the band have been signed to Century Media (damn!) and released a sophomore effort entitled *For Blood, Honour and Soil*. I wondered whether Ate was satisfied with the debut, some months after its release.

"Yes, I am still quite satisfied with the album. I think that at least five of the songs are quite good. The production could of course have been a bit better, but considering that we only had a recording budget of £2,000 there's no reason to complain. When it comes to reactions, they have been far better than expected and perhaps a bit better than deserved. I don't know how many copies have been sold yet."

In *Zeitgeist* magazine, before you had released *Where Light Touches None*, you stated that the reviews of your *Revelations of Glaaki* demo were so positive that they almost inhibited your creativity. Since all the reviews of the debut album I have read have been good, is there a danger of believing too much of your own press? How much does taking into account other people's opinions affect you as a songwriter.

"What I meant was that when the reviews are only positive there is more pressure to make better songs", clarifies Ate.

"This does tend to make me more critical when writing new material. It's also harder to focus on what should be improved if nothing is pointed out as not being satisfactory. I don't really think there's a danger of belonging to the press. After all, I always try to make the music I wish to hear and not necessarily what I believe the press expect or want. I don't know how much I'm affected by other people's views of our work, but it's very nice when people enjoy our music."

Understandably so, and I would be inclined to disbelieve anyone who states that they don't care a fig whether anyone likes their music. At least if they released their music to the public, that is.

Ate produced *Where Light Touches None*, and I think he did a good job. Did he have the option of using a producer outside the band? What did he learn from the experience, and, that old chestnut: if he could do it again, would he change anything?

"We had no plans to use an outside producer. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, we had no money to pay for a producer. Secondly, the engineer we used, who also owns the studio, is quite skilled at recording extreme music, so there wasn't a big need for a trained producer. Furthermore, I had quite a clear picture of what sound we wanted and how the songs were to be arranged. If I would like to change anything? Yes, there is always something that could have been changed, but I don't wish to think much about that. Perhaps the keyboards disappear in the mix in some places." Fair enough. The production on the debut is brilliantly clear, without any compromises as regarding power or clarity. Mentions I should ask him more about the synth parts which integrate almost seamlessly into the fabric of the metal.

So Ate, as a synth composer, how do you go about arranging the keyboard parts - do you write them on top of the main song structure? **Twin Obscenity** now have a female vocalist who plays synth in *Mona*, so will she take over the synth composition?

"Most of the time I arrange the keyboard parts over the main structure of the songs. I try not to overdo the use of keyboard, but rather use it in a way that I believe is more effective. Now that *Mona* has joined the band, I will still continue to arrange keyboard parts, but I will also let her compose and arrange keyboard parts as well. She has nine years of classical training on the piano, so I strongly believe she will be able to do a great job."

So one would imagine. You stated, again in *Zeitgeist* magazine that you thought some of the songs on the debut would be Irish-sounding - do you think the title track has a little of that influence, especially with the female vocals?

"Yes, both the title track and the song 'When the Chains are Broken' have some Irish sound, don't you think?"

Err...no. Well, OK there's something roughly Celtic-sounding in there, Irish or not.

Ate went on to reveal his other influences:

"There is a lot of music I find inspiring, but I guess classical, rock and metal cover the most."

It's funny, I thought there was something of a jazz-funk leaning to the first track. Nah, I'm only kidding.

The Black Death

Ate uses two different styles of vocalisation on the debut, a snarling black metal screech as well as a standard roar. Which does the man feel is more 'him'?

"The death metal style is more comfortable, but I think the high black metal voice is more fun. I do like the double vocals best of all, but I try not to overdo it. It would be boring to do that all the time, it is mainly for the variation."

The music is a bit schizophrenic (in the common but incorrect sense of the word) in that it lunges between death and black metal, never really sitting in either paddock for any length of time. If the vocals were one way or the other, it might land the band in one genre.

"I don't really care about what labels people put on our music", Mr Wiig opines.

"Though it seems as if people tend to call it black metal, but that's maybe because we come from Norway? I think of **Twin Obscenity** more as a death metal band, but it doesn't matter. I believe I will continue with the use of both vocal styles in the future, but it depends on what suits the music." The layout and artwork (an early 19th Century John Martin oil painting) adorning the debut were striking, and I asked Ate how much attention was paid to this aspect of the band's public relations.

"We didn't spend much time on the cover. I found some great artwork, and the designing didn't take more than five or six hours. Finding the perfect artwork did take a considerable time though. I don't know what other bands do, and luckily it's not my concern either. We had to make a good impression on the cover because our name is not very well known yet. We figured that if we only would get people to hear the music, they would hopefully also buy it." With the chain mail, one might think **Twin Obscenity** longed for the old days, but this doesn't extend as far as a hankering for the days of the long-player.

"I don't really care for LPs, but the cover looks better on them. On the other hand, you don't have the booklets with the LPs."

Crusade from the North

The lyrics to the song, "The Infernal Dance of Prince Kaeth" are based on a theme by Wojciech Kilar. How did you come by this theme, what is it about, and can you say what attracted you to base a song lyric on it?

"The lyric is rather inspired by Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It's the music that is based on the theme by W. Kilar (the main riff)."

Whoops.

"It seems as if everybody misunderstands this. The idea behind the lyric is that death is better than life eternal in misery."

When writing lyrics, which is more important to you; originality, or a clear expression of your ideas? Are your lyrics an extension of your personality, or are they more detached from your feelings and emotions?

"What I find to be most important is that the words sound good and fit together with the song. I guess the words are an expression of my fantasy mostly. I would say that the lyrics are the most neglected part of my work. I can't really say if the lyrics express my feelings and emotions. You'd better ask a psychiatrist about this."

I would expect you to know, actually. As the Greek guy said: "Know thyself". I doubt whether a psychiatrist would be of any use. A psychoanalyst might shed some light on the matter - as he lines his pockets.

The song, "Like the Death of a Sorceress", is based upon the persecution and burning of witches a few hundred years ago. Why do you think the Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries spent so



much time and effort persecuting mainly totally innocent people? "The reason was clearly to oppress ideas and opinions that threatened the Church's political position. The main thought behind the lyric is that although the people persecuted were killed, the ideas would live on and finally take revenge."

Do you think the Church saw the old religions as a threat, or was it simply due to the corruption and repression of emotion in the Christian psyche?

"I'm quite convinced that they saw the old religions as a threat. On the other hand perhaps this has had a good effect too. What would Europe look like today if it weren't for the Crusades?"

Hmm, Frode from **Einherjer** didn't think of that one as a defence of Christianity. Still, there's a few hundred years from the Crusades to the Inquisition, so Atle's point is something of a *non sequitur*.

Indecent and Obscene

"Revelations of Glaaki" was picked from the demo to be included on *Where Light Touches None*. Not because it was special, since all the songs made it over. I wondered whether this particular song had been fiddled with extensively before the second recording. How's about all those samples on there, where are they from?

"We didn't change the arrangement. We did use some different samples, basically because the tape I had the previous samples on was destroyed. You shouldn't read any great meaning into them, they're just used to "fill the empty spaces". The samples are taken from *Phantasm II* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*."

Atle agrees that the inclusion of another guitarist (Alexander) and the aforementioned Mona will allow the band to use the live environment as a medium for their songs.

"We hope to do some tours after the summer next year ('98). We basically decided to add Mona to the band because she is into the music. She also lives in the same city as all the other guys. I'm not sure to what extent Alexander will write material, I guess time will tell. If I like the stuff he comes up with we'll definitely use it."

There's something reassuring about the way this guy seems to be in control over **Twin Obscenity**. It seems that he would have few qualms sacking all the other bandmembers on a whim if he felt like it. What is his view on the fact that he has composed the music and written the lyrics alone so far?

"I feel a need to be in control, it's like it's 'my' band. I don't think there will be a problem [with new bandmembers]. When it comes to the music I don't care too much about if it's exciting to play, but rather what the overall picture will be. I think I will dominate much of the songwriting, but that's mainly because the others haven't been very active in that direction. Also, as mentioned before, I'm very critical towards our music, and when the others come up with some music it's harder to know what they think of to be the final result." I read that Atle hoped one day that he could use choirs for the female vocals in your music. This is an idea that **Therion** used on their *Theli* opus - does he like the way this has been done in that case?

"I've only heard one song from the album; "In the Desert of Set", and I liked that. I can't really compare by only hearing one song though."

Atle picks up on the theme, realising that he is limited very much by circumstance.

"The way I would use it would be rather inspired by Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* or Mozart's *Requiem*. I do hope we'll be able to use real strings instead of keyboards next time, but we'll just have to see. It's hard to predict how big we'll be in the future, but we have just signed to Century Media, so if our next album hits it off the chances of getting the budget should be quite good."

Besides the aforementioned classical works, what hits it off with you when you're at home in Bergen?

"Some of my favourite orchestral works are Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*, Dvorak's *New World Symphony* (9th), Mussorgsky's *Night on the Bare Mountain* (a true killer - **Marduk** have covered it), and *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Stravinsky's *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*, Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*, and Wagner's *The Valkyrie*. If you haven't heard any of these, do check 'em out! I've also played classical guitar for quite a while now (I started about thirteen years ago), so I also enjoy listening to classical guitar music. I also play some lute when I find the time, and I like medieval music played on contemporary instruments very much."

Finally a man who says he has experience with a historical, if defunct, instrument, although Atle is wary of being taken the wrong way.

"There is no doubt a lot of pretension. I guess it sounds better to say you are inspired by classical music than e.g. **Darkthrone**, especially if your sound is exactly like that of **Darkthrone**", he admits.

I put a hypothetical question to him. Would Richard Wagner spare the time of day for extreme metal?

"I don't believe Wagner would care much about black metal if he were still alive, and less about **Twin Obscenity**."

The sound of a thousand black metallers egos deflating accompanies this observation. Atle stated that he was impressed by **Elend**, from the little he had heard of it, so he's obviously not the most true black

metaller around today. Thank God for that.

The man was making noises about having a side project which is more based upon music like **The Prodigy**, **GGFH**, etc.

"I haven't really got started yet."

Oh, it's like that then is it?

"I have some ideas that I've recorded on my four-tracker, but I haven't found the time to work on it. I need a PC with a sequencing program before I can get started. Anyway, I have to concentrate on **Twin Obscenity** and write material for our next album. I do believe **Twin Obscenity** fans could be interested in the music. It has much of the same feel to it, and all the people I've played some excerpts for have loved it."

"I believe the recent interest has to do with the new inspiration needed to innovate the music and to create more variation and ideas", says Atle when asked about the acceptance of stranger ideas into extreme metal these days.

Some elements of **Twin Obscenity**, like many bands in related genres, seem to hark back to medieval times. Does he not think it is a waste of time indulging in nostalgia of this kind, and shouldn't we instead be using the time to build ourselves a better future?

"I find the historical basis both fantastic and romantic. I'm really into medieval arms and armour, and that's why I would spend hours making mail shirts etc. (it's very time-consuming work). I also enjoy listening to medieval music, and I don't think that people who play medieval music are wasting their and our time."

The song, "Enchanted by the Empress' Beauty" explains the relationship between sex, beauty, evil, and ultimately, death. This is actually quite similar to a Christian morality play, in which the main character falls to temptation.

"The song is inspired by Norwegian folklore. People were extremely wary of going into the woods at night, because of all the different creatures they believed inhabited the woods (trolls, gnomes etc.). What the song is about is a kind of beautiful female creature that lured men into the woods and killed them, or something like that. The concept has nothing to do with Christianity as far as I can see."

Does Atle feel that in reality, temptations are not necessarily 'evil' or bad for the individual, but that it depends on the circumstances? Or would he say that an 'evil' act is often more 'attractive' or 'tempting' than a 'good' one?

"What is 'good' or 'evil' depends on the eye of the beholder. Temptations can be great ambitions and need not be regarded as either good or evil."

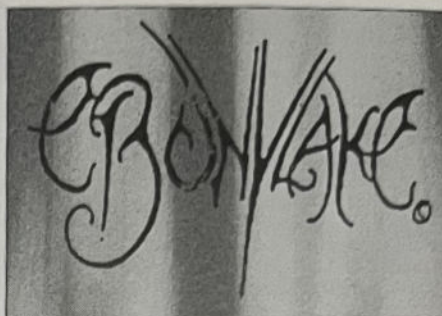
Head Not Found being the cumbersome beast it is, **Twin Obscenity** never benefited from the best publicity. You would think that bad promotion would now be a thing of the past. As the man concludes:

"We have thought of it more to be the company's job to promote the band, and they haven't busted their asses exactly. Now that we've signed to Century Media, I believe the promotion will be a lot better, and hopefully **Twin Obscenity** will be on everybody's lips in a year or so."

We await the second album, but expectations in this part of the world are quietly confident.

TWIN OBSCENITY, P.O. BOX 1090, 5001 BERGEN, NORWAY.

There were slight ripples in certain quarters when, in the last issue, I upbraided Alan Averill for branding **Waylander** an Irish band. In retrospect, I was probably wrong - at least informally - in so far as "it's all Ireland, innit?". However, I have noticed an interesting phenomenon as regards to how Ulster bands are promoted. Now don't get me wrong, there's no axe I have to grind and certainly no unionist/republican political or sectarian affiliation I would even think of throwing my weight behind. The fact remains that even certain English fanzines have got into their heads the idea that if a Scottish band is suffixed (UK) and a Welsh band suffixed (UK) - as is quite correct - than an Ulster band with one member in Ireland (in this case **Waylander**) is suffixed (Ire). Northern Ireland is, of course, whether you like it or not (and I don't care) part of the United Kingdom (but *not* Great Britain). In my book therefore, unless over 50% of **Waylander** members were from the Republic, then the (UK) suffix stands (in the event of a 50% split, then I'd say shared nationalities would be appropriate). I know it's deeply politically incorrect and unfashionable to be from the United Kingdom of Nothing (© Ian Glasper) as well as a dent in the credibility of trendy ethnic advertising, but it's always nice to get your facts straight!



Ebonylake are different. **Ebonylake** are bizarre. Most importantly though, **Ebonylake** are very cool, well at least musically-speaking. And their English too, a breezy freshness in the stalled domestic scene. I talked to a garrulous Lee, band spokesman, about the first demo, *As Ghosts We Dance in Thrashing Seas*.

"This is the first time we've ever captured **Ebonylake** on a recording" the man begins, "and this seems to be a revelation to some people, I've had things said to me like, "It's hard to believe you are newcomers" and "the demo sounds extremely musically mature". Very flattering statements, yet there is an overwhelming need to create new pieces. Having said that, we feel that each track does have a lasting value, and maybe in some shape or form you will find some of this material on the first album. As for the reaction we have had so far, the listeners seem mesmerised by the content, structure and arrangements, how the music is restless and anxious, playful and mischievous, vile yet extremely romantic in an abstract way. The concept seems very important to them also, I have had conversations with people who have spent evenings staring at an abstract painting or have spent a night on the shore watching the waves, and they say that they witnessed the 'true' essence of **Ebonylake**. A very complex and personal concept to all those who embrace it. For the run-of-the-mill metal fan, yes, it could be confusing as they are faced with a new degree of darkness."

This guy could just talk and talk. But he's quite right: the demo does not sound like it's the first thing written by a new band. Despite their youth, the bunch managed to snare Mags into producing their tape at the legendary Academy Studios. Did not the man balk at such an off-the-wall proposition?

"Strange you should ask this because Mags was quite shocked by the fact that everything worked. When we were recording the drum tracks he was saying, "So the drums are doing this, and the keyboards doing that, the bass doing this and the guitars? Doing what? Oh my God!" But Mags is very gifted and I think he enjoyed the challenge; although he did want to simplify a few sections, he seemed hungry to record something abstract and non-conformist. The fact that he abandoned the typical group formation and created a chant section gave him the opportunity to experiment with the microphones et cetera. Listening to previous Academy recordings, we knew he was capable and a good production is essential so we took the chance."

One would think the chance had paid off. Mark from Deviation Records was one of the people most captivated by the demo. But as Lee reveals, grander plans are afoot:

"Actually, we are proud to announce that Cacophonous Records have offered us a deal and we have accepted their proposal" he boasts. "As regards the Deviation Records situation, they have a sub-label named Spellcast Records who are releasing the demo officially with world-wide distribution and full artwork. The reason we decided to sign with Cacophonous was the fact that they have the power to promote **Ebonylake** and they are considered an elite label, and the first album should hopefully be out within the first half of '98, but right now we are in a 'ghastly labyrinth', the writing process." Despite complex material and a numerous line-up, the band are still very much into the vagaries of the live performance.

"The **Ebonylake** experience tells the same story whether it be in the studio or on the stage," Lee insists, "we refuse to tone down the show because of the 'associated limitations', i.e. useless sound-man, pathetic P.A., not enough vocal microphones etc., but when a gut-churningly intense performance is unfolding before the audience they become bewitched and then realise **Ebonylake** does not have to rely on volume to be frightening. Having said that, with a powerful sound and adequate stage room to perform our ceremonies, the 'experience' is legendary. We can introduce different concepts and really reveal to people our tortured souls and surreal way of thinking. **Ebonylake** is one entity be it in the studio or on the stage."

Hunting those Hyenas

Using synth means absolutely nothing in this day and age. I suppose Lee will point out that in **Ebonylake**, things are different.

"The synth lies on a completely different path from other extreme metal bands because we can compose and totally understand classical music and we are influenced beyond belief by masters such as Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Wojciech Kilar, Jerry Goldsmith, Stravinsky, and many



in the picture and the vocals frame it. The picture is one of true art, although I cannot compare the style of **Ebonylake** with any other band. I feel that we have the right elements to appeal to people who follow any form of extreme/dark/black metal art. Some people will fail to understand the music but many more will understand it fully; those who demand more."

It's easy though (and let's be cynical for a moment) to say things like that. Black metal mastered the use of hyperbole, after all. Could Lee prove to any cynical sceptics that you are genuine about your music, and not just pretentious with it? He thinks so.

"At an **Ebonylake** show any fakeness would be easily detectable, [similarly through] an in-depth interview or any sceptical cynic/critic spending time with us. Unlike many bands today conjuring up imaginary ghost stories, ours are everyday occurrences. The

poltergeist activities within my home have influenced our whole way of life, occurrences that have left some of us physically scared, from flying pictures to actually being pushed down stairs. Even a room full of people seeing and hearing bizarre things, and I for one can honestly say that ever since I was young I have had ghostly experiences, so yes I think we have genuine fuel for our fire."

Mathematical Revolt

Any song that is titled "Amethyst Lung Concerto" makes one curious as to what is going on lyrically. Would you say that your lyrical themes are as obscure as your musical ideas? Naming a song "The Theory of Sexual Carvings" hints at a carnal undercurrent somewhere in there, doesn't it?

"The lyrical ideas are as deep as the music and in these lyrics we can communicate our intentions, experiences, stories and emotions. The lyrics are very avantgarde."

But of course!

"It is our opinion that life on our earth is only to prepare the mind for the immense life after. For example, when old age embraces you, you start losing your soul, then your mind goes, then finally your body, then on the other side they return in the same order. Some people believe in heaven, a place where everybody goes, but how could that be? What might be your heaven could be my hell, so prepare your self, study and fully understand your beliefs."

Lee hints at a hidden, if ridiculously idealistic, agenda.

"Can you imagine this place filled with a race of our kind, dark, mysterious and romantic souls? What a world it would be, and maybe we will see you there. "In your mind you create your own after but cannot fear for myself." Our intention is of improving the gothic empire, i.e. the movement created by musicians, authors, artists et cetera, as the rest of the world do not give us due respect we have to respect each other and stand together."

This notion of a gothic brotherhood is enough to make me gag, I fear. Anyway, carry on.

"The Norwegians were on the right track creating the Inner Circle which created brotherhood, but it fell apart. My friends, we are all creating history, and are all part of something special, work together - build a better empire like the message in the lyric

"From the guts of barley listen,
Linen seeds devoured by birds,
As we strive to create a new empire,
Rid the sickening boring themes,
Tear the head of the normality weaver,



Stand back, absorb the scene."

Picking up on what Lee said, one of the most striking things about the whole Norwegian black metal scene of the early 1990s, as pointed out by Michael Moynihan, was how little real friendship there was there. Your bandmate blows his brains out with a shotgun, what do you do? Call the police? Go into shock? No, you get a camera, break in through a window, take pictures and collect body fragments for posterity. Is that reminiscent of the respect due in a brotherhood?

Lee continues:

"Other sections of the concept are based around ghost stories (true ones), images and pictures that I can see from our next life, the gothic mansions, the huge rolling waves, devastating storms and a multitude of romantic gothic horrors waiting to be lived out. There is a sexual undercurrent that runs through the music and lyrics, here's a small excerpt from 'The Theory of Sexual Carvings':

"Upon the hill, down on the shore,
Writhing flesh, deep and sore,
Lesbian ghosts at play,
Marble couples race by,
My friends search for their homes,
But not I, dimazing...drink the storm!"

An excerpt from 'Within Deepest Red':

"Quietly as it began, spilling then forming,
This rain is so strange - emerald I think?
The owl by my window brings tales of another,
Apparently meeting our opel".

There is also an occultist undercurrent, hence the lyric

"Some see me in the dark, carving shapes in the sand,
Unexplainable sound, phantom gathering ground."

Then of course there are some sections too personal and surreal for me to share."

As exemplified by the imaginative, but stilted lyrics, **Ebonylake** are young and ambitious. There's nothing of Dani's fluency there yet. We can wait though.

Would Lee be humble enough to admit that some sections of *As Ghosts We Dance...* are frankly too abstruse to work in a musical sense? How does he make sure he's not overdoing the push for oddity?

"Certain sections of *As Ghosts We Dance...* are written using the classical school of thought, where a lot of instruments play phrases and textures rather than running melodies."

His answer is the most detailed thus far:

"You will notice cross-rhythms within our music as you will in classical, as it is in parts totally discordant and drenched in dark chaos. When music is written on a scale it is wholly based around mathematics, it just so happens that the music that people listen to is simple mathematics and when you introduce phrases and cross-rhythms there is virtually nothing that won't work. Besides, it is completely unimportant if the mathematics in the

music are not to the textbook, when you are creating your own art you never limit yourself to old rules, as long as you are achieving your desired sound. I'm sure you'll agree that metal today is becoming more exquisite and sophisticated, not to mention more extreme, giving artists room to move freely. Gone are the days when metal was one-dimensional and stuck in a rut. It is in the nature of metal to contain the most zest and mystery, the whole metal scene was born because a number of individuals stepped from one path to another, now extreme metal's most elite bands dart in different directions, leaving other envious bands bewildered by this natural burst of creativity, and in

a desperate quest for originality they begin fusing styles together, thus the existence of tasteless crossover shit which must never be confused with musical progression. The wave of avantgarde metal has spawned new hope, new individuals who are dark, mysterious and sensitive. Within the domain of **Ebonylake** there are some very special things planned for the future."

There's only so much more that can be said. Besides "buy their fuckin' music!", that is. Lee rounds off the discussion once and for all:

"Don't make the mistake of thinking **Ebonylake** is just a band, it's much more than that, something immense, something unfinished from centuries ago! Keep your ear to the ground, a new movement stirs..."

EBONYLAKE, TILTS HILLS FARM, TILTS HILLS LANE, BENTLEY, DONCASTER, DN5 0LW, ENGLAND.

others. The amount of bands that say, "We are classically influenced" today are ten-a-penny, I've listened to a lot of these bands and with the majority of them I can't hear any classical music. Yes sure, I can hear synth riffs being played on classical instruments/sounds, but these are the kind of riffs that if played on the guitar they would be torn apart by all critics, yet played on the synth they are considered 'orchestral'. Technically it's all down to taste and we won't be revealing any secret ingredient."

Ah yes, there's that W. Kilar again. Anyway, the vocals that are used are hardly run-of-the-mill, are they? Chanted more so rather than sung or shouted. How did the band come to realise that these unique exhortations were suitable to accompany the band's music?

"Again, the voice is an instrument, as complex as any other, and when used correctly can be devastatingly dark, and haunting. We have spent many hours in dark, remote areas of the English countryside, creating the most grim and ghastly atmospheres with the use of the voice only. If vocals are going to be used then they are equal in importance to the music, thus the reason we have five vocalists not only in the studio but live also."

Yes, he did say five (5).

Few have had the courage to stick your neck out and produce a demo which digs a completely new niche in the wall of extreme music. Has **Ebonylake** been a quest for originality at any cost, or are they just extremely strange musicians? How far have the band deliberately setting out to establish their own sound, and even subgenre? I asked Lee whether he thought the risk was worth it.

"A quest for originality for its own sake would turn out musically unfocused and fake, not to mention boring. It just so happens **Ebonylake** is highly original naturally and is composed of people who are deep, emotional and who have intense personalities. I would like to think that we would die for each other. I would also like to think that we are strange individuals first, strange musicians second, as it is in my opinion you can't be one without the other."

This guy doesn't flinch from the dramatic musically. So why should he when it comes to answering questions?

"Creating our own subgenre? Maybe yes!", he continues. "There could be some musicians talented enough to follow some of the paths we leave in the sand, if so then it would be a genre that would never burn out, only grow deeper. For example, take the Norwegian black metal scene, full respect to the elite bands who will always thrive, but it is an easy sound to duplicate for the trend followers, and the trend followers like rats would multiply tenfold and the scene becomes stale. Actually, they are more like hyenas, and regarding **Ebonylake** I'm sure you'll agree the hyenas would decide to follow a different lion. As for the question of us taking an awfully large risk, well, all the bands who are achieving their goals today, from **Emperor** and the like to musicians such as **Elend** and **Arcana**, are the ones who took the risks yesterday. Can anyone honestly say that they are completely satisfied with extreme/black/gothic metal and all that it offers, and don't need any other form of dark art? From listening to the very emotional feedback we get, it is time for **Ebonylake**, and if we are taking risks then it excites us, like when you reach out into the darkness expecting to touch a face, the spine-tingling tension."

I suppose, with a gun to my head, I would compare the band's sound to elements of **Nocturnus** and **Cradle of Filth**, but even that would be clutching at straws. So Lee, how would you describe your music and are you comparable with anyone out there today?

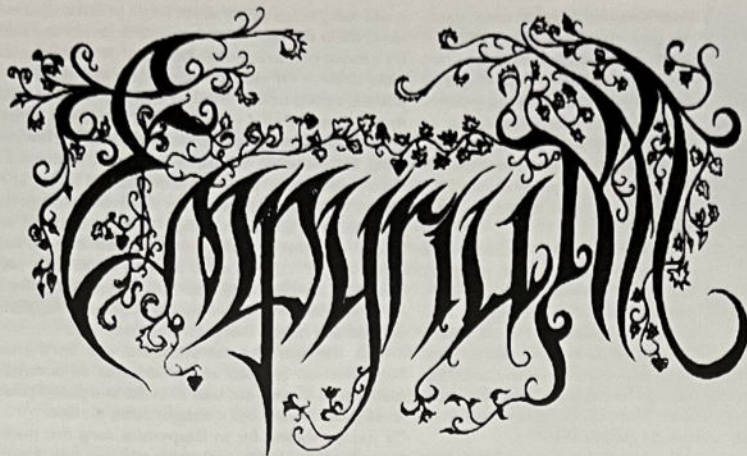
"Describing the music!"

Here we go.

"Well, as you know, today words like avantgarde and surreal are words that are spread far too thinly, to the point when you are reading a review and it's like, "Oh my God, not another masterpiece!". Do you ever feel that there is a human emotion that we have not yet named, maybe a mixture of despair and ecstasy where you're close to tears and orgasm, screaming in fear yet laughing your head off, something unseen hanging in the air, something immense? The feeling of racing towards an impending climax or the romantic gothic essence when stood on the shore watching the sunset and doing it just for the moment."

Eh?

"This feeling runs through the music often reaching points of unadulterated classical chaos. The drum lines are surprisingly emotional; they build a huge wall and the guitars paint a landscape on it, the keyboards colour



"Our aim is certainly not to sound as avantgarde as possible and to try at any price to contribute something to the extreme music scene", Markus Stock of **Empyrium** begins.

Oh God, he's brought up that dreaded 'avantgarde' word again. "The main reason for us to compose songs for our new album is simply and solely self-satisfaction and the love to express our emotions via music. Though I think we have blown a breath of fresh air into the scene and come up with something unique, as overused and clichéd as this word may be."

A Wintersunset..., the **Empyrium** debut is what some might call a love-it-or-hate-it release. Speaking personally, I was quite taken with the windswept romanticism. The vocals didn't throw me as much as some people. But musically, what's better about the new album, Markus?

"*Songs of Moors and Misty Fields* is simply supreme to *A Wintersunset*' the man says bluntly. "It has much better worked out song structures and arrangements, the lyrics are more poetic and deeper, the sound is more adequate, the whole performance is more skilled and mature and, most importantly, the atmosphere is pure melancholy and has a much darker and deeper feel to it than on our debut."

Needless to say, the general mix is improved too. "The production on *Songs...* is exactly my definition of a very good sound - I love it and am still satisfied a great deal with it. No doubt, you always learn from experience and I guess we learnt a lot from all mistakes in the past - including the production department."

One has to note the more 'softly-softly' attitude on show on the sophomore recording, but Markus rightly points out that it is more varied as a whole.

"The album is a lot heavier and outbursting too! Indeed, one of our main aims for *Songs of Moors and Misty Fields* was to compose more dynamic music. *A Wintersunset* was too much on one level when it came to the dynamics and thus it suffered from a slight lack of tension which you wouldn't find on *Songs...*, since the album offers so much variety when it comes to its structure and its dynamics."

In the review I mentioned the nocturnal ambience to *Songs...*, I guess this was intentional.

"I can do nothing but agree with you, our new album is indeed a lot more subtle and darker than our debut and this was also one of our main aims; to create a darker atmosphere, something that suits our fascinations and emotions to a great extent, and I think the title upholds this dark atmosphere very well."

The cover artwork of *A Wintersunset* probably put off a lot of people, doesn't Markus think? Those glaring purple and yellow flyers.

"Actually, it's gold and yellow...as for the combination being a bit garish, yes and no. When I saw the booklet for the first time I was blown away by its sheer beauty, but with now two years distance from it, I must say that the colours don't work the same way as when I saw them first, but I still think it's an incredibly strong packaging and leaves most other layouts from the genre miles behind."

"The design of the new album is just as the music; a lot more subtle and darker with a 19th Century flair to it. It's all held in light brown, old-looking paper with brown-shaded two-coloured photography as well. The font used is classy and I am much satisfied with the overall outcome. There's also a special edition out (which is already sold out) which came in a leather bound format with our 'E' symbol engraved in copper on the front - looks phenomenal!"

I wouldn't expect anything less from the man with the wonderful script.

"Most people refuse to believe it's a man's handwriting", he says. "At least Jan of **Nox Mortis** refused to believe it - he always thought my girlfriend would have written all those addresses on the envelopes."

How important is it for a band to have beautiful artwork adorning their releases anyway. I doubt too many people are into the aesthetics. "I don't really think that quality music can suffer due to unfitting packaging, but a release of **Empyrium** should be as seen as a piece of art as a whole, and I think the atmosphere that you express with the music is enhanced greatly by the visual and lyrical side of an album too (and vice versa of course). Truly fantastic music can't be ruined by awful packaging - just have a look like all those classical music CD designs; they look like a piece of trash, but that doesn't make the music worse."

Seven Ages of Man

What with the much derided vocals of the first full-length, I wondered if it was a lack of confidence that kept the band from printing all the lyrics. Why do bands say their lyrics are too personal to print when they are singing them out loud anyway? "Err, yes, 'the lyrics are too personal' may be an excuse for nervousness when it comes to printing the lyrics, but where does the nervousness spring from? Actually, from being afraid that you

read the lyrics and the other way around as well." He then comes around to that "use your imagination" point that many musicians are fond of.

"It's also very exciting not to know the lyrics of a band (in some cases) since there's much more space left for own interpretations and you'll go and make up your own story in your mind...sometimes you are disappointed when you read the lyrics of a band, 'cause your own 'story' has been much better."

How personally did Markus and Andreas take the more scathing rebukes of the debut? Do people get scared when they hear something deliberately melodramatic?

"I think one of the main reasons why our debut was criticised for being "hammed-up" or "self-indulgent" was the enthusiasm that you are able to feel while listening to the album. The author of one review also criticised the debut for sounding over-enthusiastic. How can art be over-enthusiastic? I mean, gems are made out of enthusiasm, of sheer passion towards what you are doing, and even though I am aware of the danger of losing the distance to your own creation, I think it's almost the be-all-and-end-all of creating to be enthusiastic about what you are doing."

Of course, enthusiasm without maturity doesn't necessarily mean that everything's gonna be OK.

"Maybe our debut sounded a little immature in places, I won't deny that, but it has much more spirit and passion than most records I've listened to, and that's the only important thing for me when it comes to art; to feel the passion, the pure emotion that the artist has manifested through his creation."

Does Markus see any pitfalls for being a young band, and how does youthful enthusiasm make for creativity?

"I don't think age has anything to do with creativity and thus I don't think our youth has hindered our musical evolution in any way. I mean I am soon 20 years old, when we started **Empyrium** I was 14, when we recorded the demo I was 16 (Andreas is just two years older) and I don't actually think I had any problems with creativity or depth. Of course, the older you grow the wiser you get (at least in some cases - and getting adult in the common sense of the word, meaning that you have to be sensible, is definitely not getting wiser - I'd rather wish to be eternally 16 years old again instead of taking part in this disgusting procedure of getting adult and sensible) and that is also valid for your musical evolution, but there wouldn't be any difference if we started **Empyrium** at 18 or 20 years of age."

Markus can't be dissuaded that the debut was a creation whose time had come, one way or another:

"You may recognise that I think we were ready to record a CD back then, and I love *A Wintersunset* the way it has been done, with all its small mistakes and its slightly immature feel - actually this gives the music something special, which obviously some people love and others can't bear."

Herr Dirkschneider

Some people could not bear Markus' vocals to such a degree that they seemed to ignore everything else.

"My normal vocals are and will always be the most discussed part when it comes to **Empyrium**", he agrees. "I have heard comments about them ranging from "I love your vocals" to

showed too much of yourself in the lyrics and that other people might laugh at you! Of course you could go and say "but that goes for the music too!" and that's right, but since I was feeling always more as a musician than a poet I had some difficulties with releasing the lyrics on paper, it's all released through the music though, so there shouldn't be many problems anyway."

Things have changed now though. "On the new album the lyrics are printed down, so everyone can read them and have a laugh at my expense, ha ha!" Markus says self-deprecatingly. "Maybe some might also enjoy the music more after they have

"The vocals suck", which is fine, since they are actually able to move the listener whether in a negative or a positive way. I must say that I am rather dissatisfied with my vocal performance on *A Wintersunset...* (which includes the screams as well) while I think the vocals on *Songs...* are absolutely the way I wanted them to be. The most important thing when it comes to vocals is that they have something unique, call it charisma, some aura around them that makes you shiver. Whether they are performed with great technique etc. is unimportant in the first place. Look at a vocalist like Udo Dirkschneider - this guy can't sing at all but people love his vocals anyway, because they have that certain 'something' to their ears."

Again though, I would point out that the above case is one exception. One requires a certain level of musicality to make any vocalist bearable.

"I don't know whether I am a natural born vocalist or not," Markus follows on. "I don't even look upon myself as an instrumentalist either, even though I can play six or more instruments (at least in a way that they don't sound like a cat that's been pulled by the tail). I see myself mainly as a composer - someone who is able to express his emotions through music. The question of whether my vocals restrict **Empyrium**'s music is totally out of place, since they belong to **Empyrium**, it wouldn't be the same without them, and therefore they are rather enriching our sound, like all other elements we are incorporating."

Still happy with the work that Prophecy has done for your two releases Markus? Any plans to move up in the underground world?

"We are still absolutely satisfied with our co-operation with Prophecy. No plans or anything to leave this label. Prophecy does a killer job, and actually isn't that small anymore."

He's having none of it.

"One of the main aspects that keeps us staying on this label is the absolute freedom we have on Prophecy - I doubt a bigger label could offer us the same."

A change though would allow a greater number of people to hear your sound, with next to no compromise for you musically.

"For sure do I care about how many people listen to our music, even though it's not the most important thing for me. But, no doubt, it's important for an artist to reach appreciation - the more the better."

"I think the health of the band is rather affected in a positive way by staying on Prophecy than anything else. You see, we are still satisfied and I hope and honestly think that this will remain so for a while."



Cigarettes and Alcohol

There are umpteen solo projects around nowadays, but it's harder to find bands with two members. Markus gives his reasons for **Empyrium**'s two-man situation as based both on practicality and close friendship.

"It's both easier and more difficult to work as a two-piece band. In the past, when we were still four members, we had tons of trouble finding a style everyone could identify with."

It's also difficult to get four

people to a rehearsal and the enthusiasm (or obsession) for the music and art in general has been, non-existent from those 'members' back then. Nowadays these problems are all solved, we compose our music each one for his own, meet once in a while and put our stuff together. The difficulty when working as a two-piece is to work out the music as detailed and well-arranged as a real band is able to do. You never hear the full result at a rehearsal and you can only compose the songs step by step, but with the time you are getting used to this situation and there's no real problem anymore - it's all working quite well thanks to modern multi-track recording on which we save and work out all our material."

The friendship between the two bandmembers evidently extends way beyond music.

"Andreas and I have known each other since childhood, smoked the first cigarette together, drank our first beer together and watched our first horror movie [together]." Err, hold it there. I hope this is not going to get too personal Markus!

"It's no overstatement saying that we are best friends," he continues, "which might be one of the greatest advantages we have in the band. We have always been able to let our emotions run totally free, since we know each other so bloody well. Of course there are always situations of

tension in a band, which mostly occur in the studio while recording the album, where it is not seldom that we end up arguing massively with each other, just to tell each other a while later how well the whole thing turned out, but eventually we are a very good team."

So how are the creative duties split between you, is it six of one and half a dozen the other?

"The songwriting process works mostly that we work out the main melodies and structure of a song together, like 50%/50% input. After the main structure is finished I usually start working out the finishing parts, the bass, guitar, vocal, whatever, lines and we end up arranging the song in the end the way we think is best."

Democracy in action. Or not.

"There is no real main songwriter in *Empyrium* but I dare to say that I am kind of the one who is leading the band towards the general direction," Markus admits, "but without Andreas' help and phenomenal melodies, *Empyrium* wouldn't be the same for sure."

Narcissism

"I am absolutely not one of those musicians who can't stand listening to their own material", Markus states in answer to my question of how long he can tolerate his own music.

"Actually I am almost overdoing it sometimes, like the first two months after the CD was released I almost listened thrice a day to it or something. Nowadays I'd say I listen once a week to *Songs of Moors...* and once a month to the demo and our debut CD. I still love it all, and I am not bored of it. At the same time I am of course always involved with compositions of some sort, be it lyrics, a new part or a whole new song. Musical ideas are always with me, wherever I am, whatever time it is. I am constantly structuring and arranging songs in my mind."

Ah, the quintessential musician. What exactly does it feel like for a creator to ponder on his own masterpieces?

"The feelings that I get when I listen to *Songs of Moors...* are hard to describe, but they are very close to those images I visualised while composing the music. *Songs...* is like a vast and thousandfold landscape. A dark, romantic and melancholic landscape that shines in sometimes grim, sometimes glorious beauty. And while I wander this landscape I recognise that it is me!"

You?

"Every single tree, every breath of wind, it's all undoubtedly me, myself and I - how uplifting that is! - to re-experience all your emotions again and again - I am finding much deeper into my real self through *Empyrium*, and I live through the music just as the music lives through me. A wonderful symbiosis that creates dimensions of inspiration. I'd say there's enough space for individual interpretation. Our music and lyrics are just the same path - where it leads to is up to each individual, and thus I see every interpretation as valid. Good music should always strike some chord within you, it should be able to let you feel and make you thoughtful - you'll be drowning in your own emotions then, stimulated by the music you listen to."

I can do naught but to concur with those thoughts. Besides, it would be futile arguing with a man so obviously infatuated with his own work.

Dead Guy with a Moustache

"I loathe the black-white concept of thinking that has infested the brains of most men with all my heart", Markus states, as things turn more philosophical.

"People simply can't see that opposites exist to co-exist to enrich each other and thus to melt together something new. Day - night, man - woman, love - hate, joy - sorrow.....one couldn't exist without the other, and to simply focus on one side (and denying the importance of the other side) of things is not only an incredible lazy way of looking at things but also foolish and dangerous (see religion)."

Markus spares no pity for those who suffer from theologically-induced tunnel vision.

"It doesn't frustrate me that people can't realise the beauty of negative emotions and the positivity and energy these emotions create - it's their loss, not mine! All I can do is try to stay the hell away from their simple-minded way of thinking."

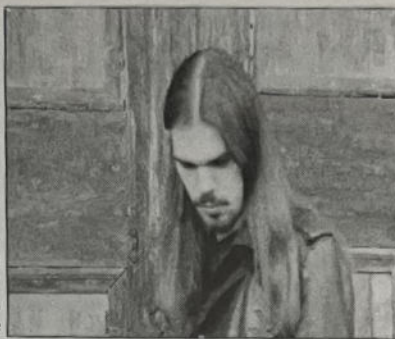
Would the man consider his ideal outlook as "beyond good and evil"? If that means anything at all.

"I think Nietzsche was referring to those few individuals that could free themselves from the concepts of black and white, good and evil etc. Those who recognised the numberless shades of grey that exist between black and white and lived their lives according to that are beyond good and evil. I view myself as one of those 'free-thinkers'."

Down in the Doldrums

Markus often states, as touched on before, that negative emotions are the main inspiration for the whole *Empyrium* experience. One interview answer that caught my eye and made me wince a little concerned the relative strengths of positive and negative feelings. Can the man clarify things here?

"What I mean by 'negative emotions are much stronger' is simply that most people are not able to feel really deep emotions in their lives until the day they first feel real sadness, like when someone beloved dies. Most often people afterwards say that they've never felt that deep before and that they even enjoyed it because these feelings were so deep and all-consuming. I don't know how that is with other people but I am generally speaking much more emotionally touched



Markus

when someone dies than when someone gets married or gets a child. I think that negative emotions are deeper and you will stay longer in their embrace than with any positive emotions - they are gone as fast as they've come, while sadness remains. But then again, is there any emotion purely positive, or purely negative?" Markus goes on to answer his own question:

"In fact sadness can't be seen as a negative emotion since it is simply our way of processing extreme happenings and thus turning it into something positive for us again.

"Love conquers all" is not an all-too-silly saying, since love is definitely the most important of our emotions, but one should not forget the pain and hate that are always involved. To say it with Goethe's words: "Ach, der heiligste von unseren Trieben, warum quillt aus ihm die grimme Pein?"

Well, I'm still not convinced. Maybe it's a question of time going faster when you're having fun? Anyway, Markus goes on to reflect on the melancholy he's perpetually on about:

"Let me clear up one thing: depression is not the same state of mind as melancholy or sadness. I had a depression a couple of months ago and I tell you that I couldn't find any pleasure in it - it was more like I hadn't done anything for over three weeks. I was simply not able to do anything, it felt like I was sucked into a black hole of complete emptiness, and there I couldn't find any pleasure at all."

It's funny though, how so many seem to revel in melancholia, Markus being no exception. Is it not a very weak state of mind, feeling sorry for yourself and all that?

"I think why we come to enjoy melancholy or sad emotions is the depth they offer us. I mean, sadness is such a big and romantic emotion, it's something that everyday life doesn't supply and thus we can even enjoy staying in its embrace for a while. I think it also has to do with the fact that it lets us feel "important and virtuous" but most of all it lets us feel we are alive. Lord Byron once said something like that the main aim of his life is to feel that he is alive whether through pain or joy - to feel is to live."

Which brings us on to its musical application.

"*Empyrium's* music is about melancholy, which is actually the state of mind where sadness and joy meet - you come to enjoy the depths of sadness and once you've tasted the wine of melancholy it's almost like an addiction. It's a drunk-like state of mind in which you are taken away to those dim vales of melancholy. For me as an artist this is something like a blessing and I merely view myself as a medium that tells the tales written in the vales of melancholy."

Suicide is rooted in depression, rather than melancholy. But does Markus feel people have a right to kill themselves, should it logically be deemed a legal action?

"I think the main reason why people commit suicide is that they want to cast all their grief and pain on those individuals left behind - to let them feel how they felt. In that case it's an incredibly selfish, egoistic action that gives the impression of someone who drowned in oceans of self-pity - but, I view it rather as a very courageous action than one of cowardice. Let me quote some very interesting thoughts by Timo Tapani Ketola of the almighty *Dauthus* magazine:

"The thing about not being 'strong enough' is another I find most amusing. What is there to prove [it]? If Mr Jones is not interested in living another thirty years, then it's up to him to quit his life. To live is way easier than to die. And moreover, the first human right is the right to decide about one's own life."

"I find this statement very interesting as it is definitely up to each one what he wants to do with his life and as much as I condemn the selfish and egoistic character of people that commit suicide - only in those cases beloved ones are left behind - (and I am sure that almost 90% of all suicides are committed due to that feeling of self-martyrdom, self-pity and that "now let them feel how I felt" attitude) I look upon it as an action of incredible will and courage rather than of being a coward."

Suicide is, nevertheless, probably less motivated by feelings of revenge, than by the seeking of a solution to a condition of hopelessness and mental pain.

Love, Sex, Intelligence

"I have written a couple of songs about love, but I always portrayed love's grim and painful sides as well, as there is no love that exists without the shadows it casts."

We've turned to one of Markus' other favourite emotions now. Would he consider exposing himself totally in this dimension, lyrically?

"Actually I don't think a pure love song is something that would fit *Empyrium's* music, since I view 99% of all pure 'love songs' as incredibly cheesy and over the top kitschy. I actually haven't

heard many songs purely about love's positive aspects that move me in any way - it's too worn out already and besides it's a theme not dark enough (am I evil or what?) for me to write about. Of course I appreciate and enjoy all the positive aspects of love greatly, I couldn't be without them, they give me the kind of balance that I need not to drown in those black and bleak oceans of discomfort, but something, and please do not ask me what it is, keeps me away from writing music about the positivity and beauty of love - in my lyrics there's always pain, melancholy and grief, yet portrayed with a beautiful edge. It might be that I know bloody well that not all concerned with love is 'happy happy joy joy' - there's much more to it. So yeah, maybe one could say that songs that only portray the glory and joy of love are nothing but big lies in order to supplant all the grief and tragedy that is involved with love."

I think the man's hit the proverbial nail on the head. Love's far too complex and precious to be covered respectfully in a song, not least in as far as a purely positive sense goes. Markus lays it straight down the line:

"If you are waiting for an *Empyrium* song that portrays the jolly sides of love exclusively you will wait long for sure; I'd rather sing about last weekend's football matches."

But why is it exactly that happiness doesn't make a song feel right? Markus agrees with Mikael from *Opeth* in that it's not something that lures the Muse, if you like.

"I think it is to do with the fact that happy songs simply have a serious lack of depth. All things sad and weary are simply deeper and one thousand times more moving to Mikael and I, and basically I would say to any true artist around. I don't have to be melancholic or sad when listening to *For Funerals to Come...* (to give you some examples), gazing at a painting of Caspar David Friedrich or reading Edgar Allan Poe's *Dream Land* for that sake - I can enjoy these sombre moods at any time at any place."

Psychobabbling

David James, a British psychologist, states that one major reason for higher incidences of discontentment in our age is the unrealistic portrayal of the world, as well as a disproportionate coverage of high-achievers (be they fashion models or businessmen), in the media. Does Markus think there's something in that?

"Interesting question. I think our materialistic age and the wish of possessing material goods (to fill emotional holes) is indeed a prime reason why depression might have increased. But we are talking about depression. I don't think melancholy has anything to do with that, as you are either born melancholic or not - it's a matter of character and of the depth of your thoughts I would say. I think that the main reason for real depression is simply

Andreas



that those poor depressed people miss something in their lives, which is in most cases simply love, acknowledgement or at least a bit of human warmth, as cheesy as it may sound. People that can't find any of that in their life often try to compensate for this 'loss' through materialistic goods which are indeed fatal to their own emotional health (O dear, I am sounding like a psychiatrist here), 'cause as we all know, materialistic things can't compete in any way with emotions."

Can one ever be truly happy anyway?

"You must be kidding? I mean, if you ever showed me someone who is fully content and whose wishes and emotional needs were all provided for I would maybe start thinking about it, but since this is impossible (and here I am 100% sure) I don't even start to think about that. There's always something that makes you feel uncomfortable, however small and unimportant it may seem it can make your day with ease."

Splitting Headaches, Splitting Atoms

"I have not gained the impression that sexual abstinence helps to bring about energetic and self-reliant men of action, or original thinkers or bold emancipators and reformers. Far more often it goes to produce well-behaved weaklings who later become lost in the great mass of people that tend to follow, unwillingly, the leads given by strong individuals."

(Freud remarking in "Civilised Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness", that though becoming an adult meant renouncing many of our sexual desires, those who renounced them too much developed other problems.)

How much of it comes down to sex? Aren't some of the greatest achievements of civilisations the work of people who have failed to make the greatest adjustments, such as William Blake? Isn't it possible to be satisfied and well-adjusted to such a degree that one in fact becomes depressed, bored and boring?

"Even though I wouldn't say that all great art has to do with sexual frustration, I can do nothing but agree that all great art and also philosophy to a great extent, is born out of discomfort, melancholy or dissatisfaction. If I was a 'jolly good fellow' *Empyrium* wouldn't exist, or at least wouldn't sound like it does, since *Empyrium* is indeed a kind of therapy for me to express all negativity that is haunting me, it's in the same way a therapy to listen to



other dark music or consuming 'negative' art in general."

Mortuis stated in *Isten* that round-the-clock orgasm would be too much. What does Herr Stock think?

"Having an orgasm for 24 hours a day is indeed as desirable as listening to a sound that consists of twenty blown-out orgasm-bombast parts in a row."

He's not making it clear whether that's good though, is he?

"What is important to a good song is how it is built up - the structure is almost the be-all-and-end-all of a good song and in **Empyrium** we are indeed trying to build up a song so that we stay as close to 'orgasm' as possible and then at one point (most often at the end of the song) attack with full artillery to bring us all into an orgasm-like state of emotions. So, if you like, we are tantric songwriters."

It's a nice image, and one which is appropriate for a band as 'green' as **Empyrium**. The man elaborates on the nature theme:

"I am of the belief that everything is interconnected and that man is just a part of nature like nature is a part of man - I mean that every action of man is influenced by nature or indeed *is* nature. Man has just broken the connection and thus brought everything in some sort of imbalance, which will mean the end to one part of the divine unity."

Unfortunately, Markus goes on to bring up this anthropocentric view of 'nature' that so many are fond of scaring us with.

"I am sure that nature will 'strike back' and will cleanse the world for some aeons of regeneration", he says. Scientists have already foretold the first extreme natural disaster for the year 2030. Of course, I do not know exactly how bleak the situation is and if the destruction of the environment is in any way exaggerated or not since I can only rely on those facts I got through the media, but I have a feeling inside that tells me that the future looks very bleak indeed. A short look at the masses of scum and rubbish out there just confirms my negative thoughts. We actually haven't deserved anything else than to vanish to where we came from - the big cosmic nothing."

I wouldn't be so sure. Worryingly, there's a similarity between Markus Stock and Timo Kölling, editor of *Moondance* magazine, in that they both share a mistrust of science.

Markus admits it in as many words: "I think the only way to get everything in balance again would be to introduce man to his roots again - to the olde [sic] way of thinking and acting. I don't want the [people of the] world to become primitive barbarians, but nowadays we are so far gone from our archaic consciousness that it is not bearable anymore - there's absolutely no connection anymore to those precious old ideals and the glory and purity of times past. Technology is just fine in the right doses but we are definitely overdoing things and science - O science! - might be the root of all evil. It has bereft us of all imagination, fantasy and all of those mystical bonds to nature, even though there are still some individuals who don't believe anything that science and technology have brought up."

The man goes on to contradict himself.

"I wouldn't even say that technology is the reason of all, it's rather how we use it, or better-said, how we are used by it. It's all far gone..."

Blaming science to my mind is as ridiculous as blaming intelligence or curiosity for the current state of mankind or blaming uranium for the threat of nuclear war. Rabbit on all you like about vivisection and genetic engineering, but in the words of Sir William Crookes, to reproach science is to "stop short in any research that bids fair to widen the gates of knowledge, to recoil from fear of difficulty or adverse criticism". I'll forgive this Luddite here for now, he seems an affable enough character.

On more green issues, perhaps it goes without saying that Markus disapproves of blood sports.

"I have", he starts, "seen a report on foxhunting on German television and I was quite shocked by the brutality and the sheer disrespect with which the foxes were first hunted and almost scared and exhausted to death, and afterwards killed by those 'brave hunters' on their horses. I mean, hunting is a natural thing to do, to hunt and afterwards consume the meat to survive, but killing helpless creatures and even enjoying this procedure is a perfect example of how perverse and far-gone common man is today."

Taking Stock

As we draw to a close, it would be sensible to put the focus back on the music. The logical question would be to ask what can be expected from forthcoming **Empyrium** compositions. So I did.

"I think our future material will be in the typical melancholic **Empyrium** style, yet those few passages that we have composed up until now sound both a lot more orchestral. [This is] due to the use of more electronic and acoustic elements to create the orchestral atmosphere, but also a lot more metal with a heavy emphasis on the guitars. These mentioned passages could as well end in the garbage can again, so I'd better wait for a more adequate point in time to discuss our future material."

Markus closes the interview by answering the question of how he saw the broader future for this band and music in general:

"I don't have any limits for **Empyrium**, if we could make a living out of our music one day, I would be perfectly content with that, but the last thing we do would be to force our success or something. We will keep on developing our style, playing music that reflects our heart and emotions and revelling in their sheer passion, beauty and melancholy that our art casts upon us. There are definitely no limits. We'll just do whatever we desire."

Nearer the time of publication, Markus told me that he had just opened his own 16-track recording studio and hoped to have it established professionally and build up in his new home town by October. Look out too for his new project **Sun of the Sleepless**; "grimme [sic] yet dirgelike black metal hymns to the black at heart" as the flyer proclaims. He also mentioned an acoustic MCD that might be put out under the **Empyrium** banner. Whatever, you'd be a fool to miss it.

"May it please Heaven that the reader the reader, emboldened and become of a sudden and momentarily ferocious like what he is reading, may trace in safety his pathway through the morass of these gloomy and poisonous pages. For unless he is able to bring to his reading a rigorous logic and a spiritual tension equal at least to his distrust, the deadly emanations of this book will imbibe his soul as sugar absorbs water."

ULVER

So begins *Les Chants de Maldoror* by the Comte de Lautréamont, or Isidore Ducasse to use his less aristocratic-sounding, born name. The author died at an early age, and was almost unknown during his life. It was only posthumously that he was recognised as one of the fathers of the Surrealist movement. Further excerpts from the work are replicated in the boxes over the next couple of pages. It's a favourite literary work of a man who lives in Norway and calls himself Garm. I managed to hassle him into an interview in the week before Christmas, 1997.

"So look for him vainly,
He, the incarnation of evil:
And by arrangements of magical nature
He turns unrecognisable even to the
experienced eye."

Just like His Infernal Majesty in the **Arcturus** track "Master of Disguise", Garm was a hard fellow to track down. When the man fails to telephone me at the arranged time, I obtain his number from Century Media and give him a buzz. He apologises for the misunderstanding and we rearrange the interview. At the second time of asking I'm informed that he is not able to phone, and that he will try another day from his friend's house. Third time

lucky. Although Garm apologised for being tired and uninspired, I think we got somewhere over the course of the fifty minutes. The man represents a lot of what was good about the black metal scene post-Euronymous, and although he is evidently losing interest in that scene *per se*, his involvement in **Arcturus** has helped forge a new direction in extreme music. I listen to *La Marquise Infernale* and it makes all the listening to the crap I've forced on myself in the past year-and-a-half seem worth it. If this is the indirect result of multiple churchfires, then fuck it all, set them all ablaze.

I started the interview with questions on **Ulver** and followed up with a more detailed interrogation regarding **Arcturus**. I'd heard nasty rumours about the singer, but though at times curt and even defensive, he fell a long way short of being rude.

Cry Wolf

I started by putting it to him whether reviewers and listeners had been overly disconcerted by the raw production on **Ulver's** *The Madrigal of the Night*.

"It's certainly a possibility" he muses. "Some of the people who like the melodic black metal thing but don't like the '92 style of black metal, the new-guard of fans or whatever, obviously don't really like the production on that album much. That's fine by me. So it might certainly be a possibility."

The actual music on said album is really pretty neat; melancholic and relatively melodic blackness barely touching the softer aesthetics of *Berglutt*... Could not the music itself convey the primal black metal atmosphere without a one-dimensional production?

"It can, but not in the kind of sense that we wanted to convey, not really a musical message. It is a traditional sound, so we felt that the time was right for another production which was kind of like an anti-production, like some magnificent predecessors have done before us."

For the rather grand, typically Garm-sounding "magnificent predecessors", read **Darkthrone**. The other thing the album shares with the work of Fenriz' lot is the artwork of Tania Stene.

"I don't know", the singer says when I ask whether the art is a little rough-around-the-edges, "I think it's not really that rough, just a traditional oil painting image so that's pretty much her style. I mean, if you look at some of the stuff she did for **Darkthrone** and stuff like that, that's even more foggy and dim, in-the-edges, so that's basically her style of painting."

Garm laughs when I mention the irony that the album with the least accessible and least commercial approach was released on the biggest label the band had yet been signed to:



"Ha ha, yeah it is, but Century Media really liked our first album."

Did they realise what you were intending?

"Yeah, they weren't taken by shock. I pretty much told them that OK, we can sign a contract for three albums now but you must know that the first one we're about to make now is a very vain kind of work, so you won't sell heaps of records. So they were aware of that, but in spite of that I think it's sold 12,000 records, so that's not really that bad."

Was it a distraction then putting out an album that was recorded such a long time ago?

"No, it wasn't recorded a long time ago, it was created in the beginning of '95 and then our guitarist went to Denmark for a year to study guitar."

He pronounces it "gee-tar" in his generally fluent American English.

"Our drummer went to the military so we had a year's pause, and then we rehearsed a couple of months when we were all together and went to record it, so that's the story basically."

The first **Ulver** release struck a chord with me, as with many other people. It was very much a new slant on a genre that was already beginning to get hopelessly overcrowded. The folksy touches, together with the wonderful singing, brought a more romantic approach to a black metal scene not accustomed to hearing so much feeling in a record. *Kveldsanger* was even more pastoral, if a little inconspicuous. Is it the restless creativity of **Ulver** that has resulted in three very different styles of *trøisk* metal?





"I don't know," Garm answers, "it's *becoming* like that, but we hadn't planned it from the start because when we made the first record - which was a concept album - we decided that we wanted to continue doing concepts but at the same time parallel to creating *The Madrigal of the Night*, we, or Håvard (the guitarist) and myself really wanted to do an acoustic thing which was solely based on the acoustic thing we did on the first record again. So we decided to do both that plus a blacker album, because we really wanted to make something more **Dark-throne** after the first record. It was a coincidental plan, so to say." I read somewhere that you said the *Vargnatt* demo might be released on CD?

"I've never said that" he snaps, before softening his stance and going back on himself. "I don't think so, I may have said that we got several offers to do it but we won't. I don't like them [the tracks] very much, and besides, the whole thing of releasing demos on CD is a waste of both people's money and bad quality."

Having said all that, *Vargnatt* was a real rough diamond, and is certainly worth tracking down on the tape-trading circuit.

You also said, in the interview with *Godreah* 'zine, that *The Madrigal of the Night* was a musical union of romance and evil?

Are you playing with people's perceptions, because pure evil is surely not romantic? Moreso banal and boring, it tends to be fantasised evil that is romantic.

"I don't think so," Garm says, "because...I remember what I said: 'it was a glorification of the fiery crossroads between the opposites'. That was what I said, although I don't really agree with you that evil can't be romantic because romanticism is a feeling or sentiment based on something passionate, and there's a lot of passion in cruelty, so I don't agree with you. What I remember I said was that it was a glorification of the crossroads or the path balancing between the two opposites, so I think that was the original intention."

Whatever Garm did say in the interview with *Crán*, not all of it, clearly, was printed. He has something of a point though, as Tompa of **At the Gates** once screamed: "What is evil but good tortured by its own hunger and thirst?"

Skeletons in the Closet

Garm has hinted that future **Ulver** albums will be more folksy and atmospheric with additional computer effects:

"Yeah, we'll use the computer more or less as an editing instrument, and it will be a little further from black metal, which doesn't really attract us much. That was the thing with the *Madrigal...* record, I recently said in *Terrorizer* I think, we kind of got that thing out of our system by doing that record. Don't get me wrong; I like the style and we really needed a record which was that way but I won't be doing like two or three more of them, y'know?"

Later on we'll discover that his divergence from black metal has been on the cards for some time.

Garm has, in previous publications, drawn attention to himself and his bands through some rather interesting interview answers. In the first *Dawnrazor* magazine, the man answered all questions referring to himself in the third person. He's well aware that he's said some rather embarrassing things. Take *Mortician*/*Namskull* magazine's first issue, where he stated: "I am born in the wrong century, and **Ulver** will be my camouflage until then!"

"Ah shit," he laughs, cringing at the other end of the line, "that's actually very funny, because that's a statement that several people have written, shit like that, y'know it's such an immature manner of speech." "Twas a long while ago now, when Garm was but 17 years old.

"Yeah it was," he agrees, "I remember the magazine it was done in as well; *Mortician*, because people referred to it so many times, we hadn't released a record yet. I was more into the little, super-sentimental, longing back to a time and a place where you've never been and you never really knew, and all that shit that a lot of bands use."

I get the feeling that things have changed; his cellular phone keeps going off throughout the interview for a start. Hardly medieval. I suppose he's taken the camouflage off now then?

"I'm much more up-to-date with society now, and not only up-to-

date but also very interested in modern aspects of life, even though I don't really take aloof from inspirations from the past, but it remains stupid to say it the way I used to do." Nevertheless, if we were all judged by what we'd written at that age, few would pass unscathed. Just look at my first issue. Or rather please don't!

La Bête Noire

Has the success of the unusual aspects of the last **Arcturus** album surprised Garm at all? "I don't know", he thinks as we leave **Ulver** altogether.

"No, I have to say no because I knew when we made the record that it would become a bestseller, I think I knew that all along because it is a very good album and - besides being strange which perhaps isn't really a commercial trait - you can certainly pick out very technical and melodic aspects to the whole album which I knew all along would appeal to a broader audience. So, I think I knew it would become a bestseller."

A bestseller, sadly, is certainly not what *La Masquerade Infernale* became. More like a financial disaster, not least because of the £10,000 production costs. It's a crying shame when one considers the quality of the music and the impact it has had on the metal scene.

The original working title for the album; *The Satanist*, would certainly have been ironic. Satanism is for many the keyword in black metal, so why not unleash such a beautifully bizarre album with a generic name?

"Yeah, I know," he recognises, "but that was my idea; to be very direct and do something that was extremely up-front. And then give it a whole new outlook through the music and lyrics, give the subject or the connotation; the Satanist, a new face. I'm certainly eager to paint Satanism in other forms than **Marduk** or **Cradle of Filth**."

I don't think one can paint Satanism in any baser colours than those of **Marduk**. Garm presumably is in favour of a more highbrow approach.

"Yeah I mean, I wouldn't really go round saying, 'Hey, I'm intellectual, look at me' but yeah, I'm more concerned with Satanism as portrayed in literary traditions and both the symbolic and ideological meaning than being the evil bugbear, you know."

Atoms Like Incense Rising

I remember listening to a tape-traded copy of the *Constellation* shortly after it was released. The guy who taped it for me was convinced it was the best thing since sliced bread, but as I listened to it and as rays of sunlight pierced my living room, I just didn't get it. Those synths were so fucking obvious, and it took me a long time to readjust. In due course I recognised it for the masterwork it was. The debut was generally applauded but one criticism of *Aspera Hiems Symfonia* I read made the point that sections sounded too staged and pompous.

"Yeah, it is," Garm agrees, "and the new one is pompous as well..."

But in a different way.

"Yeah, but with more room for self-irony, so I can understand why people don't like pompousness, because in many ways I don't myself. If it's done cleverly then it's perhaps the most powerful thing to do ever; to be pompous but at the same time not to ridicule yourself. The new album is a lot more mature in its compositing than *Aspera...* so what can I say?"

And it's exactly this element that makes the band such an attractive proposition.

One revelation on *La Masquerade Infernale* was

the delightful song of one Simen Hestnæs, how did you come to use him?

"Basically, to get some diversity, because on this record I've had a more prominent role as a producer maybe than only as a singer or whatever, so quite early we decided to not only use him but also use other people, and it's actually strange that we didn't use more people. We'll probably use even more external people in the future because it adds to the album, giving people impressions of diversity. I think when you can start thinking whose the benefit of the music is, instead of thinking of your

own egotistical reasons to play music then you're starting to really become a musician. We chose him because we thought he sang well, I mean I've known him for many years so it came quite naturally."

It amazes me that the only other singing the man appears to have done were the live vocals for **Ved Buens Ende**. If I remember rightly *Kerrap!* reviewed the **Impaled Nazarene** gig in London that Halloween and even printed a picture of Simen prostrate on the stage.

For me, "The Chaos Path" is the most impressive track I've heard from the weirder end of metal. I just can't listen to it without dropping whatever I happen to be doing at the time. Nick Terry was spot-on: this is idiosyncratic beauty *par excellence*. And it's the singing of



Hestnæs that tops it all off.

"Yeah sure", Garm is content to agree. "I mean that was actually a song that originated in a project that he was having with the keyboardist, which never really became anything, it was just a couple of rehearsals. So, it was basically goodwill from my side. I just said, 'Hey, fuck, you sing like hell on that song, I don't see any reason for me to go and fuck that up', so he sang on our record, that's the whole story."

He wrote the lyrics to that song as well, and together with some of the aspects of the CD layout it concerns itself with chaos magick, does it not?

"Yeah, to a certain extent."

A popular topic in the underground right now.

"Oh right, I wouldn't know", he says in the most aloof manner possible.

Let's just say **A Mind Confused**, **Sacramentum**, **Eternal Dige**, and perhaps even **Bolt Thrower** to name a few. Khaostars everywhere.

What's the attraction of it for you?

"Only that it's very open. Very, very open. You have the centre of the star which is, for me, the brain and then you have the arrows going out in all directions, so it's basically a symbol of open-mindedness."

Unlike for example, the Kabbalah, there are no religious hang-ups or history with it, are there?

"No, it's more a modern philosophy," he says, "I think it's not based on old icons and stuff like that. It's pretty much an up-to-date philosophy."

From the little I have read about it, things tend to be couched in speculative quantum physics and stuff like that. It seems pseudo-scientific.

"Yeah, that's actually more of the mathematical part of it, that's the part of it which interests me least. I really like the provocative thought-patterns and the acknowledgements of all and everything, and the right in everything; the right in wrong and the right in right, so to speak."

Look on the back of the *La Masquerade Infernale* CD box, and along with the chaostar you will see another symbol. Now what on earth could that be, kids?

"Also," Garm proceeds to explain, "we've used that symbol with the **Black Sun**, which is basically an old symbol used in some Surrealist literature, so it also becomes closely tied to life-Surrealism, where everything makes sense and at the same time makes no sense if you know what I mean. So we play around with a lot of those aspects as well as the pure chaos."

The **Black Sun**, **Thagiron**, **The Realisation of Dreams**, **The Übermensch**, **The Goal**, **The**

Beast 666, **Fenrir**. It's not the first reference to the Kabbalah, judging from the serpent of wisdom coiled around the Sephiroth printed on the *Aspera Hiems Symfonia* CD. This klippoth, **Thagiron**, is home to the animal in man, struggling up from the unconscious to control him. Apparently. The **Black Sun** was also postulated as the source of **Vni**, a black light from the cosmos clearer and purer than any known of Earth and beyond corruptibility of human failings. Viktor Schauberg, a Nazi 'scientist', developed this concept under government backing, in the search for a clean, eternal energy source. Are you bored of tenuous Nazi connections yet?





Massive Attack

I wondered what Garm was thinking when he postulated a future extreme musical direction in *Terrifier* as a mixture of metal and jungle rhythms. Why?

"Because that's what's happening", he says bluntly. "It's not really a speculation, it's just how I see things develop, especially in your country actually, where the whole computer-edited rhythm thing is very big these days."

The Prodigy perchance?

"Yeah, definitely **The Prodigy**, but you also have the American superstars, **Marilyn Manson** and that you know, incorporating the same things into metal and becoming extremely popular with it. You know, bands like **Massive Attack** go more crude, more guitar-based, so it's just what's happening, it's pretty much the future of metal I think. Just look at **Fear Factory** for example. Even though I don't really like that band, I don't really like the style either, I just see that's the way things are going. But I don't like, y'know, the **Pantera** thing with drum 'n' bass rhythms. There are a lot of bands who do that stuff and they tend to get extremely huge."

α (alpha) Bootis (Arcturus), mag. 0.04, is the 4th brightest star in the constellation of Boötes. It is a red giant, 27 × the diameter of the Sun, lying 36 l.y. away. Its red colour is noticeable to the naked eye, and is more striking when viewed through a telescope. Arcturus has a mass similar to that of the Sun, and it is believed that it will eventually swell up to become a red giant like Arcturus in 5000 million years.

A Demon in My View

Lyrical speaking, does the Edgar Allan Poe poem you used in one of the new songs ("Alone") relate to Garm?

"Yes, certainly, I wouldn't have used it if I couldn't find any values that I could identify with."

Fine y'know, I was just checking...

Putrefaction Records released the first **Arcturus 7"** in a batch of 1100 copies. At that time the line-up only had Hellhammer, along with Steinar (guitar and keys) and Marius (vocals and bass). The song "My Angel" was in fact a love song in which Marius screamed for his Hawaiian girlfriend to come back to him. His lyrics go, "I love you, I need you, you are my angel". Could you, ahem, twist a love song into the **Arcturus** concept?

"I wouldn't have any aversion to it" is Garm's only marginally surprising response. "Yeah, certainly, but I won't be doing it this week so I wouldn't know... That's pretty much how I am, I have no aversions against that, if I really wanted to write a lyric that was kind of focusing on the goodness in me. If I wanted to do that, I'd do so." Would Garm say that the wisest people are often the saddest people? Again, in *Mortician* magazine, he stated that he yearned for wisdom.

"Yeah, that's inevitable, because when you have strong ideals in life and become aware of the fact that you can actually never become your ideals, you tend to get depressed about it. At the same time you can also have an intellectual rejoicing in the fact that you are who you are. A guy who lives 100% for football and beer doesn't care too much about the bigger issues in life so obviously he or she would lead a happier life than some intellectuals."

But it is nonetheless preferable for you to be more broad-minded, intelligent and wise than not having a care?

"I wouldn't say that, I'd say that it's beyond my control, I can't do anything about that. As Fenriz once said: "When Hell calls your name there's no way back." A very wise statement."

Was the new **Arcturus** song "The Throne of Tragedy" based on the same Sværen poem as the **Ulver** demo song "Tragedien's Trone"? "Yeah."

Why use it again?

"Because it's a good theme, and I didn't really think that much about it. We had our Norwegian early version of that poem on a demo that was sold in, I don't remember, 350 copies or something, so I decided, "What the hell", and used it again."

This dedication to the "Perilous Quest of the Faustian Spirit", how do you relate to this?

Garm's a little tight-lipped:

"It is a very grand and poetic myth about a guy with the same reasons to live as myself, so that's pretty much it, it goes without further delving into. I guess you understand what I mean."

Between Heaven and Hellfire

The vocalist has stated in the past that **Arcturus** reflects his love of classical music, but he is clearly annoyed by the way in which any remotely musically-conscious bands tend to make a thing out of some pretentious appellation to more highbrow tastes.

"Why the hell should one say that one's influenced by classical music? I don't see any grandeur in the statement itself, it's just that in **Arcturus** that's a fact, a lot of the music is based on classical music. On *Aspera*... we even had a lot of riffs that were practically stolen from classical music, so that's a fact."

Hey, when was the last time someone admitted that? He continues:

"Even though **Arcturus** was based more on...I don't know the English word, in Norwegian I'd say [something untranscribable but most likely referring to the Viennese school], which was more the Bach and Mozart, well myself I am into the more early 20th Century composers; Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Mahler, those kind of composers."

You said in *Terrifier* that your new "art syndicate" and remix album would enable you to reach an audience better qualified to understand your work.

"Yeah, I guess I said that. [It was a] boasting thing to say."

Boasting or not, can you succeed?

"To a certain degree, yeah, because both here in Norway and abroad we've certainly come into close contact with a lot of interesting people during the last year or so, so it seems that we are in fact in the process of building up a status in different, what can I say...subcultures."

I put it to him that his biggest audience (by far) at present is from the extreme metal scene. Surely, there'd have to be a drastic change in **Arcturus** if they are to appeal to a different cross-section of people, by which time they could lose the fanbase that originally so acclaimed them. He's not so sure.

"That doesn't necessary mean to lose all the people that listen to what I do now, but I've always been the way that I do what I want to do, no matter what people think, and I wouldn't allow myself to continue playing black metal if that's not really what I want to do. I mean, I've released several albums now with material more or less related very closely to black metal, but now I'm not really listening that much to black metal, I'm not really interested in the black metal kind of philosophy or the way to clothe yourself or whatever black metal basically means. I've lost a lot of interest, and therefore it's quite natural for me to take a step further and do different things. I also hope at the same time that some of the people who have followed what I've done will be interested in my new steps, but it's not really my responsibility whether they will or not."

Someone in Haninge, Sweden knows my next question is How old is Garm today? "22".

Whatever one thinks about the man personally (and from proceedings here there's no reason to begrudge him anything), he's certainly got a lot on his curriculum vitae. Besides the undeniable success of both **Ulver** and **Arcturus**, he's got a line in producing music and even, years ago, had a little-known fanzine of his own called *Eclipse*.

Is the drive to expand his horizons mainly there because he's accomplished a lot in a short time?

"I don't know," he sighs, "it's a sign of growing up. People tend to grow out of the whole black metal thing without really claiming that it's immature, even though what that's basically what I'm saying here. In 1992 especially, when Euronymous and that whole thing was at its peak, all the people involved were from 16 to 18 or 19 years old, when Euronymous at that point in time 24 or 25. All the people were basically very young and ignorant and I see also now that a lot of people I was in touch with at that point in time have certainly widened their perspective on things a little bit. Another interesting thing is that a lot of people not necessarily interested in the heavy metal thing, but more into the aesthetic side of black metal, you know the whole Satanic, dark or whatever thing, have used some years reading some books and stuff and when they do that, as a consequence of that, they change their minds, because they get more insight and see it from another angle."

To Garm though, is Satanism still effectively the thin line between romance and total destruction? "Yeah, it is."

And what would be your reaction to a cynic like me who would say that Satanism is purely a reaction against the meaningless nihilism inherent in atheism? The search for spirituality albeit in a curiously reversed manner. "Read some books..."

Recommend any?

"I'd recommend certainly *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by William Blake, and *Mal-doror* written by a French Surrealist called Comte de Lautréamont."

That's all very well, but he might as well have said *Winnie the Pooh*, if I reduce things to the absurd. It's all fiction, and interesting in an aesthetic context, but is it really grounds for saying that Satanism is anything



"In between the arrows of time, I suffer eternally..."

more than a romantic affectionation?

He continued:

"I'm not necessarily speaking of Satanic works here but if you study the origin of Satan a little bit you tend to understand Satan as something different from what Euronymous used to believe He was, or it was. And I'd say that after all the years that Lucifer's been denied bliss, he's certainly changed his mind once in a while about his profession. It would be absurd to think that the Devil never really learned anything from all his years as an outcast, y'know. Because to me, to me Satan is an icon of being a pariah, basically."

That ties in with the "Master of Disguise" lyric, doesn't it? "In a sense, it ties in with living with it. Living with, what can I say, a demonized frame of mind and being happy about it, so it's actually a very positive lyric because it's based on the happy side, the jolly side of being a Satanist, ha ha!"

He's right, in so far as if sympathy for the Devil (and all the traditional demonic imagery) is to exist, it should at least be channelled into something individually constructive and positive.

An Olden Domain

It might be short-sighted to finish the interview without a recognition of what Garm has contributed to **Borknagar**.

The tour supporting **Rotting Christ** never came to anything after all.

Can he tie things up for us on that front? Garm reveals that things came to a head around the early autumn of 1997.

"No, I was never going to tour with them", he insists. "I laid my cards on the table long before [it was arranged]. I mean, I wasn't sure I was doing anything after the second album. When I did the second album I said to Century Media that I didn't really have the strength or dedication to go far on that, so when we got to Germany this guy from Direct Management

came up and told me, "Hey, you're going on the road in one month", and it was like, "Oh hey, cool, nice of you to let me know". I didn't really say that much until we got home because I was focusing on just doing the vocal stuff, and so then I basically said, "Fuck you". I mean we never rehearsed with that band so it would have been impossible to tour with them anyway."

Garm reveals that as far as he's concerned, the **Borknagar** chapter is well and truly closed.

"I've quit. I'm pretty happy with having quit as well. I don't see **Borknagar** as especially representative of what I'm into, either musically or aesthetically. So, even though I had a good time with them and I really like the people in the band and all that stuff, and we're still friends, I'm very

happy to be back to the more "Garmish" kind of things. I like things taken more to the limits than being just somewhere in between, which is basically what I deem **Borknagar** to be: it's not particularly original, the lyrics and the aesthetics aren't particularly clever and it would get too boring if the band continued doing that. If I'd had more to say, I'd definitely have changed the whole outlook of the band."

What more can I add? Except to say that if you haven't already, listen to *La Masquerade Infernale*. It should change your



I've always thought that there were uncharted territories within black metal. Even **Emperor** have only really begun to scratch the surface as regards the fusion of extreme metal with classical music and symphonic structures. Snatches from "Thus Spake the Night-spirit" from the band's understandably over-hyped *Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk* hint at that, and attain that ethereality seldom reached by lesser mortals. Few have actually heard of **Limbonic Art**, the Norwegians on Samoth's Nocturnal Art Productions. Their music is wispy, dark and often bombastic, to me sporadically eclipsing **Emperor** in terms of sheer evil bombast. After the release of their sophomore effort, *In Abhorrence Dementia*, Daemon was kind enough to answer my queries.

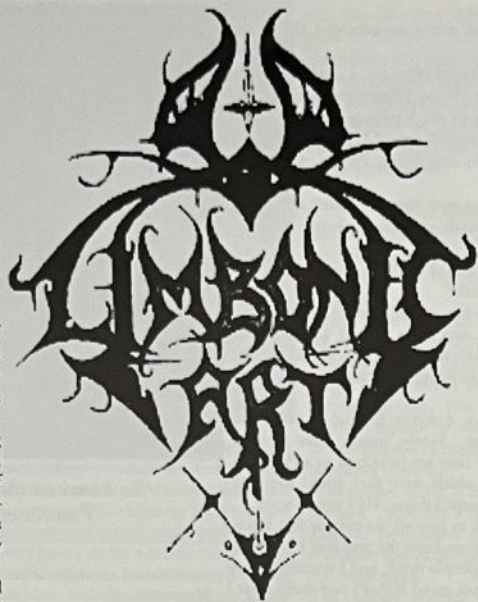
"The second album is a natural development from the first one as we see it", he says, explaining the changes involved in the second opus.

"We wanted to make an even more furious and powerful release this time, and it turned out to be a quite good one too. We do this of course mainly in our own interest, and we are not that desperate to get famous or to gather as many fans as possible and sell a lot more albums. We consider every **Limbonic Art** release to be an object of art that speaks for itself and perhaps about the artists as well in some hidden messages."

The main problem (some would say distinguishing feature) of the band is their use of a drum computer, which is programmed in a more singular manner than many others. Is there any possibility that the band could employ a human sticksman?

"When we first decided to use a drum sequencer," Daemon answers, "the decision was final, and I don't think that we ever will invite new blood to join us (besides Morgana who helps us out on stage live). We think that the drum sound is okay on the album but there will be minor changes in the future to improve every sound detail, so maybe one day we will find an even better drum sound."

Part of the reason, as Daemon hinted, is the fact that **Limbonic Art** work most efficiently as a two-piece. He goes on to mention his



That's if you believe what Jeff Mayo writes in *Teach Yourself Astrology*. Those second-books I bought at the age of ten would always come in usefull! Anyway, I digress.

Painting the Stiff

Daemon feels that the path to musical excellence is long and hard.

"We have no musical education behind us," he says, "it is only a result of many years of interest and practise, and I would say that we have both been very dedicated to our faith and art."

He proceeds to state that everything should come from inside the musician.

"I believe that the true and only way to success is based on a natural talent, in which you prove your abilities in what you produce. Making music comes very naturally for us 'cause we live with it inside constantly, and when we open up the music is let out. It might help the inspiration to study other artists well by listening a lot to their work, but one can not rush your own talent/artistry by that reason. In my opinion there will be more chance for rip-offs than rub-offs in your own work."

It's immediately noticeable that **Limbonic Art** use corpsepaint. Justify yourself, Daemon!

"**Limbonic Art** prefer to use facial paint because it is a ritual thing to do. One prepare the soul/spirit before and act during make-up. It would have been easier sometimes to just skip the paint but we will continue to do so as long as it gives us the right feeling. We are aware that the make-up thing has been really exploited and many use it just because of the trend. But it is a matter of wearing it with honour and dignity and to live out the primitive culture of art."

You really can't win nowadays. Use it and you'll be branded as a trend-follower behind the times. Abandon it and you'll be branded a trend-follower pursuing the anti-trend. To each his own, but I guess it does depend on how ugly you are.

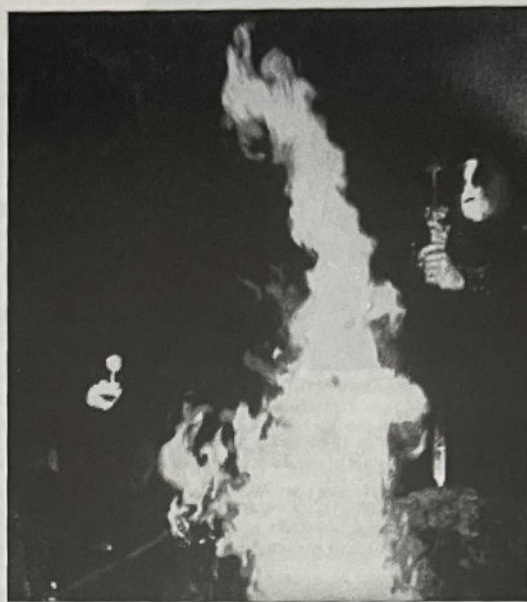
The Beast Within

Besides the classical influence to their music, Daemon assures me that there are other alternative sources of inspiration for his chosen craft:

"We are quite inspired by alternative music to metal as well, stuff like **G.G.F.H., Ordo Equilibrio, In Slaughter Natives** and so-called darkwave/ambient types of music have been a great influence for us. We think it is important to make the music out of our own hearts instead of following specific rules or getting stuck within certain limits. If we find it interesting in using special effects in our compositions or having unordinary sounds, beats, etc., we use it without caring what others may think. That's when one can create something original rather than drown in the vast ocean of bands and styles. And that's when one can raise thine own 'legion' rather than becoming a duplicate of someone else."

He's quite right, but how does the band escape from the well-trodden lyrical paths so enamoured of the darkest legions of Satan? How far do these topics relate to the man's fascination with the darker side of existence?

"All my lyrics are dark philosophies from the shaded side of life," Daemon explains, "where I often feel like an open channel for disharmonia. Human systems force me to live in the shadows, 'cause among them I am only a beast who has submitted to the forbidden pleasures and the dark unconsciousness. In reality I am only honest to myself and follow my own path instead of joining their pathetic systems. Life often torments me and the tempting voices from the cryptic realms below often make me want to join them for eternity, but there is still a very strong dominion of earthly lust in me. The flame of will to play and compose extreme music is burning now more than ever. I guess that I have many sorts of messages to serve the audience, but by time you probably figure something out yourself by studying



our Art!"
Take or leave what you will of the man's misanthropic stance, but if the music's this good I'm not going to meddle. What are the daemons driving Daemon? Does he think the demonic archetype has any material parallel?

"I believe that the powers of the mind can actually do whatever it wants if it crosses the illusive threshold, and if no one is a good receiver there are no limits for what one can achieve either" he begins.

"Demons mostly exist in the unknown levels of the human brain, ergo a mental force, but there might be more than just a

shadow that follows you on a dark evening walk, or sweeping like a cold wind as the deathlike silence pervades the room. The darkness can 'materialise' itself if you are a believer. At least that's my theory."

It seems we are at least a level higher than the conception of demons as physical entities which the more gullible inverted Christian might acknowledge. The man prefers to remain diplomatically silent when I query the more basic Satanic beliefs espoused by the likes of **Marduk**.

Still, Daemon is quite conscious of the fact that his mystical persona might attract unwarranted attention:

"I am aware that the mystic Aura that I may have can attract an unnecessary focus on my person and that I would have rather preferred a lesser quantity of curiosity from the audience to obtain the overwhelming need for solitude that I require. But I try not to bother that much either, I make myself visible when I have the time and if I feel like it, and lucky are those who receive an answer."

So, I'm a fortunate one then, that soothes my ego. Seriously though, the band have not exactly had the biggest publicity push, and I can count on one hand the number of **Limbonic Art** interviews I have read and still have enough fingers to twirl a drumstick.

Nocturnal Farting

Daemon mentioned the live arena before, where the band have been at least nominally active. As is usual for the more 'sophisticated' black metal act, the difficulties involved often outweigh the benefits.

"We have experience of playing live but as you said it is very difficult to recreate the albums atmosphere in such events" Daemon says, following my lead.

"The equipment along with the technicians and sound-speakers are always messing up the good quality of our musical adventures, so maybe it is too 'spectral' to be performed live. Then you have all those who believe that stagediving and stage-climbing are the main goal for the night's show. That is one reason why we refuse to tour more than necessary and do only a few exclusive shows to promote the band."

Live or at home on the stereo, would Daemon say that his music is the most faithful means by which to express himself?

"It is hard to find true word of sense sometimes to all the weird thoughts and happenings, but I do believe that through this last decade of darkened wandering I have learnt a few things. If I want to express myself I can always do that without the music as well, but it is somehow easier to deliver emotions and "messages" in the music. To me the music is art and magic and that's all what matters."

Daemon rounds everything off with the **Limbonic Art** battle plan for the coming months:

"We will first of all continue our crusade under the flag of Nocturnal Art Productions, and there will be more dark musical voyages in the near future. We will also consider going on a little tour as headliners with the second album's material as the main source in the shows. Whatever time will bring us!!!"

DAEMON, SOLBARKEN, LIVERØD, 3243 KODAL, NORWAY.



partner in crime:

"Morfeus and I work quite well together but there are times when we do not agree in musical opinions considering our own composition. I am older than Morfeus and I am maybe more into the primitive and harsh old-school sound than he is, but we try to mix both personalities as best as possible. We share a lot of interests as well and it is not often that we feel limited in any way!"

Scorpio in the Ascendant

The first album *Moon in the Scorpio* hints at an astrological worldview. Why this name, and indeed, could Daemon explain why the rather bizarre band monicker was chosen. Limboic Art, Limboaic Art, Bubonic Art, **Limbonic Art**?

"**Limbonic Art** is the product of me and Morfeus as we explore the dark dreamworlds beyond and experience the darkness of ourselves as well. All the ideas are revelations from an illusive Limbo of the/our minds. The Moon stands for intuition, while Scorpio is a symbol of death. A doorway to perception!"

Whatever. Scorpio was cursed as evil throughout the ancient world; the Mayans cursing it as the "sign of the death-god". From its probable origins in the Euphrates Valley, the sign represented a half-human, half-scorpion monster. The upper, human half belonged to the upper regions, the lower half to Hades. Astrologically, individuals born with the Moon in Scorpio tend to be emotionally-charged, reserved and deep, often resentful, possessive and moody.



"There are some happy bands, like **Skyclad** and bands like that, but in general yes, maybe they are a little bit too depressive. I suppose **Skyclad** is actually my favourite band; I really enjoy those happy tunes they make. **Skyclad** is a great band."

So says Frode Glesnes of **Einherjer**, when I ask him if the melancholic tendencies of bands are too pervasive. It seems I've found another fan of our

bold folk metal troupe. **Einherjer** share with **Skyclad** a knack of writing uncannily catchy tunes, as demonstrated by the former's excellent *Odin Owns Ye All*.

I mention the fact that **Skyclad**, in contrast to the joviality of the music, features some awfully bitter lyrics.

"Yes," Frode agrees, "they are. Martin Walkyier, he could kill himself anyway!"

The world would be a far, far less interesting place if he did, heaven forbid. But Frode, is it intentional or natural that your music sounds a lot happier than many other bands?

"No, it's just our way of writing. We don't want to sound like, I don't know - the melodies don't have to be 'kill myself' melodies. If we write a happy tune and it sounds good, then we use it, we don't care. But we will always try to get the lyrics to match the music."

"Out of emptiness,
Out of Ginnungagap,
Came Yggdrasil,
Came life."

From the obscure but charming *Aurora Borealis* onward, **Einherjer** have been writing damn fine music, overflowing with verve and catchy charm. It was regretful that the release of the *Dragons of the North* debut album was plagued by label incompetence. Frode is careful not to reveal too much, but he does make clear his annoyance with the Austrian label:

"There are some details involved in this case that I won't give in public, but let's just say that Napalm Records did not do what they were supposed to do for us. So we just got fed up and when we got the deal from Century Media we decided to just fuck Napalm."

Suffering from an arguably subtle and bruising production, said debut was nonetheless greeted enthusiastically by the media. The few who reviewed it, that is. The guitarist recalls when I asked whether he was surprised that the label went in for them.

"Surprised? Actually that's what we'd always wanted, and sooner or later we thought we could arrange it. We were actually flattered more or less, because Century Media is a great label, they really do what they are supposed to do; they really work for you."

What about *Far Far North*, was that something Century wanted to have from you straight away?

"No," he corrects, "originally *Far Far North* was supposed to be released on Napalm, but when we got the offer from Century Media, we were not 100% sure what we were supposed to do: if we were going to release it on Napalm or just let Century do it. We decided to cut everything with Napalm and just let Century Media release it."

You released your *Aurora Borealis* demo on Necropolis Records, some people are critical of re-releasing demos on CD. Defend yourself!

"When Necropolis first came to us," he obliges, "and asked to release the demo on CD, that was in, I don't know, early '95 or something, and he told me that if we sent the stuff over to him straight away he would guarantee that it was supposed to be released within a month. It actually took a year and a half before he managed to release it, so if he followed the actual schedule, then it would have been one of the first demos to be re-released on CD. But he delayed it a year and a half, and everybody has released their demo on CD in the meantime."

It's Grim up North

One thing apparent to those who have followed the band from the demo to the *Lete Vikinginden* single, and then on through the two albums, has been the clear-cut stylistic change between each release.

"It's just a matter of development I think,"

Frode conjectures, "because we hopefully get better when writing music and arranging music, and we get better as musicians. But after all I am still satisfied with the demo and the *7"* and everything, because that is the stage we were on at that point."

The band have increasingly come to rely on the English language, as Frode explains:

"English always flows better in a song I think, and now we have got ourselves a new vocalist with clean vocals so if we were supposed to sing in Norwegian it would really sound crap, I can guarantee you. We will only have English lyrics in future."

This prompts an update on the line-up front. What happened to the old singer Rune?

"He's not in the band now," Frode reveals, "we got some problems in early '97 and that was when the offer from Century Media came, we wanted everybody to be 100% in the band, with everybody giving everything. Then suddenly instead of being in the band, they would give more to their daytime jobs, their houses and cars and everything, so they were actually forced to leave. So, me and Gerhard suddenly had a huge problem: we didn't have a band."

No shit.



ons... album I have written almost every lyric", Frode explains. "On the new album, there's just one track that I haven't written. Our new vocalist hasn't written anything yet, I don't know if he ever will. Basically it is me writing the lyrics, because I am not the music-

making kind of guy, I'm more the playing kind of guy. Our drummer Gerhard, he is actually a genius when it comes to music. So if I made a song, he would change it and would do a lot better the next day, so I have given up that shit actually, I'm just letting him do it. I know if he does it, he does it better anyway, so I don't care!"

As a drummer, synth-player and composer, Gerhard is one of those enviable individuals who seem to be able to turn their hand to everything. The man can even play guitar too. Frode hints that the fact that the synth player was writing the material was difficult for him at first, and looking back, it's easy to spot the points on the debut where the rhythm guitar was left to fend for itself while the synths stole away all the melodies.

Words of the High One

"You can never guarantee that we will stick to this forever, you know", says Frode Glesnes when I ask him whether the Viking theme will be a quintessential part of **Einherjer** through years to come. "I don't know what the future will bring. As for now, well we've got a lot of ideas for many albums, so I think we will stick to the Viking mythology thing for a long time."

The band used the obligatory Thor's hammer on the *Far Far North* MCD, don't you think though Frode that this is a clanging cliché?

What does this symbol mean to you, and wouldn't it be better to use something more esoteric, more Odin than Thor, so to speak?

"Yeah, but the Thor's hammer is the ultimate symbol, if you know what I mean. To me that just means power, and the way I see it our music is powerful and the strange thing is that none of the lyrics on that EP are about Thor anyway! It's just a symbol."

Are you more fascinated by Odin than a character? "Yes, absolutely. I am much more interested in Odin, because there is so much more to learn about Odin than there is about Thor. On the new album there are a lot of lyrics about Odin actually."

On the inlay of *Dragons of the North*, there was an excerpt from *Hávamál*. The same excerpt constitutes the basis of the chorus to "Home" on the latest album. The phrase obviously strikes a chord for Frode.

"I don't think Odin's words will ever die", he says. "I don't know why we used that particular phrase, I just love that phrase."

He's not the first. After all, Varg Vikernes used it on the back of his *Det Sam Engang Var* T-shirt print.

"That is a coincidence", Frode is quick to point out; "I don't like that guy."

Indeed **Einherjer** have at some point, believe it or not, been labelled with the nasty 'N' word. He admits that it's a problem.

"Yes, people always get that impression and I really hate it. Nazis use the same symbols as we do, and especially here in Scandinavia there are a lot of Nazi bands and big-Nazi gangs, all that kind of shit, so it's very easy for the man in the street just to think of us like them, the Nazi guys, because they are in every newspaper all the time for doing something wrong. I think it's totally stupid; the Viking thing has nothing to do with Nazism at all, the way I see it."

You said in a past Terrorizer interview that religions were a "mass of negative energy". Does this not apply as well to Asatru?

"The Norse mythology is full of humour", Frode points out, "and as far as I know there are no other religions that have any kind of humour at all. Also I would like to add that I do not believe in this stuff, it's just a kind of interest I have. But yes, they just make problems, I can't find anything positive in any religion."

Apocalyptic Raids

Does Frode feel you need to be born, or at least raised Scandinavian to capture the Nordic feeling in a band's music?

"Actually I don't think you can produce it from the outside", he says, "because from little kids in school, the folk music and everything has always been around us, we have listened to that kind of shit all our lives. Also, when it comes to the Northern myths and everything, that is the kind of thing you read in school. So, you get it from the beginning actually, which you won't in Portugal or wherever."



"We had an advertisement and we now have a new vocalist with clean vocals so that will change our sound a bit, and we've got a new bass player. We haven't managed to get hold of a second guitarist yet but hopefully that will come."

It's the crooning of new singer Ragnar Vikse that really takes on to a whole new level. Fitting in with the bombastic passages perfectly, the sheer strength of the man's voice makes one wonder how **Einherjer** coped without him. Rune seems utterly pathetic in comparison.

Logological

I wondered whether the band were pressured by Century Media to change the logo to the legible version on *Far Far North*. The other one was nigh on impossible to read, but it seems the band are sticking with it. Did they want to change it?

"No," Frode says, "but the cover was not supposed to be like it is, so that's why the new logo came up on the front. That was supposed to be on the inlay booklet in the digipack, and we had a lot of problems. Anyway, we will continue to use our old logo, even though people can't read it. We don't care."

"That particular logo", he continues, "is so much more than a logo, it's an art-drawing actually. On the CD cover it's so small that you can't see the detail. The original is about one-and-a-half metres long and I think it is about 40cm high, so there are a lot of details. I think on the new cover on our new album, then we will probably have a lot of logo detail in the booklet, so that people can see what it's all about."

At the time of the interview, **Einherjer** were on the point of heading out to record the new album. Where did they choose?

"We are going to Los Angered studio in Göteborg, and the producer will be Andy LaRocque; the **King Diamond** guitarist. I'm really looking forward to working with the guy; as a guitarist he's been one of my guitar heroes for years, then I'm meeting the guy! It will be great."

What kind of a sound are you going to go in for?

"A more heavy metal sound."

The strength of the latest album is the fact that it is very much a self-contained collection of songs, while *Dragons of the North* was less focused. Frode doesn't think there are major flaws on the first record:

"I wouldn't say big mistakes, there is always something that you want to do better or in another way. This time we will use the same recipe as we've always used; heavy metal mixed with Norse folk music. This time I think it's musically little bit more back to basic heavy metal, but still there a lot of melodies on top of the riffing and drums, basically more heavy metal than our debut."

Will new guy Ragnar come up with his own lyrics?

"I've actually always written lyrics and on the *Drag-*



The six-stringer is hard pressed when I ask him if the coming of Christianity to Norge brought any benefits:

"Maybe there could have been some positive things if it was done in another way. If Norway was Christianised in another way, for some people it could have been positive."

But as it happened?

"Well we stopped killing foreigners, hal' That is a benefit."

Why do you choose to dwell on the past, shouldn't you be striving for the future?

"Yes, but the future will probably bring things that you don't like, so it's probably a little bit of a romantic way of thinking but everything was better in the past."

He goes on to (correctly) directly contradict himself:

Of course, there were a lot of things that were really crap in the past too, but the future will bring a lot of trouble, I am sure."

Frode doesn't mind that many see his band's concept as escapist: "As long as you can't escape from reality, I think it's positive."

Does he think society in the late 20th Century is too clean and safe, too sanitised?

"No, I think there's enough violence but the problem today is that everybody else wants to decide what you should do. There is always someone up there in politics who always decides that 'they can't do that' or 'they must do that', and all that kind of shit. Today you are not able to just do what you feel and take the consequences. Of course you are responsible for yourself today too, but I don't think that jail is the right answer."

Leve Vikinganden

The band's inception was at a knees-up thrown by one Ivar Bjørnson. These guys appear to see themselves as mere pretenders to the Viking metal throne. As Frode puts it:

"Enslaved, of the Norwegian Viking bands, I do like the most, because those guys are from the same area as we are, and I've always known those guys. I do actually think that they were the first Viking band."

Do you think their dominance can be challenged?

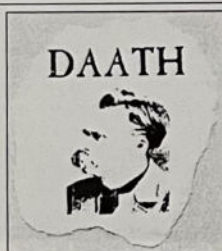
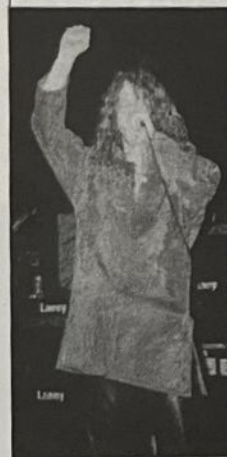
"Other bands will break their dominance but they will always stand as the cult thing when it comes to Viking Metal, just like Bathory does."

"I don't have a clue actually", Frode laughs when I ask him where Einherjer want to be going next. "Now, after we signed to Century

Media, things are happening quite fast.

It is actually just three weeks ago that we got the message that the album was to be finished on the 31st of March and released on the 4th of May. Our tour is starting on the 5th of May, we're touring with Cradle of Filth, and I don't know, things happen all the time, so in five years a lot of things will have happened so I won't have a clue where we will be."

The band opened up for Old Man's Child and Dani's lot (on the night when the latter's most elaborate stage set was filmed), putting in a show highlighted by a riveting stage presence by the new singer. As the band trudged off-stage, the bloke in the crowd next to me gasped, "What a fucking band!" There's not much more to add to those words; Einherjer are just 100% heavy metal. And if you don't like that, you can piss off!



A cautionary tale concerning a Swedish Sundsvall-based distributor named Daath, who offered to buy some copies of TDSII on commission. I agreed and dispatched five or ten copies up to him, together with an order for some of his merchandise. I have not heard from him since, despite one or three increasingly angry follow-up notes. So, if you bought the second issue from this loser, make sure you never buy from him again. The man (who if memory serves was called Kristian Olsson) used a picture of Nietzsche on his letterhead, together with two othila runes, if that rings any bells.

More nonsense from that clown Peter K. from Abigor, who having been graciously interviewed last time, responded to a recent query about this magazine with the terse: "I think it was something from England. Fuck it. Everything from that country sucks, when it comes to music."

Not quite everything Peter. This is the same man who, when asked to name his favourite albums in Dark Blaze 'zine, nominates Sabbath's excellent History of a Time to Come, from a band as English as they get. I don't think an Austrian slagging off English music has much credibility as it is anyway. Despite the fact that Supreme Immortal Art was one of the masterstrokes of the year.

ACID DEATH

Greece's own Acid Death play that brand of technical death metal that has been lost out there for some time. Combining aggression with melody and some fusion influences, they create music a little more exotic than your everyday Deicide.

I got in touch with Savvas-Jake, the band's curiously named spokesman, and put it to him that their debut album is completely unheard of in England.

"I know that our Pieces of Mankind is totally unrecognised in England", he echoes. "This has to do with the not-too-good distribution that Metal Mad has. We feel very bad about that, and this is not the only problem; Metal Mad generally thinks that things are rather good with the distribution it has all over the world, but they aren't. We try to arrange everything we can for this CD to be distributed everywhere, but we can't do many things, just because Metal Mad has a way of working that is totally different of what we think is good. Our thought is to look for another label, of course bigger, which will be able to work better with us."

It's such a shame because the music Acid Death play is original and modern, but just doesn't seem to be flavour of the month at the moment. More bands should take influence from the likes of the technical bands of the early 1990s, instead of the braindead Americanisms of Machine Head and Pantera.

Acid Death though, are not accurately comparable to anyone. "You're right!" Savvas-Jake agrees. "Our style is different to all these bands you mentioned. We just tried to make something interesting, something new. We put together with our death/thrash influences some other things we liked. I dare say it isn't easy enough to push it everywhere; the typical death metal fan wants to hear something less technical. But we think the stuff is real good for everyone, just because everyone can find interesting things in it. The most important thing is to have a good label to promote and distribute it."

Acid Death must be wary of not becoming too lost up their own backsides, trying to incorporate as many jazzy, technical and exotic elements they can into their brand of thrash metal.

"I agree. But this is not our purpose in music, we just play in the way we feel. The technical point was something that we had also on our previous recordings. Generally I think it's not good for a fan to see a band change it's style as the years pass. But for a musician this is something useful. In my private life I like to hear many different things, from brutal death metal to fusion. I try to unite these things in music and so do the other guys. If we feel bad doing this in the future we'll stop doing it."

It's always such a shame that the technical death metal bands of years past never caught on in a commercial sense. The lowest common denominator seems the easiest reference mark to copy. Perhaps bands should study music more seriously?

"The technical style wasn't popular enough through the past years", Savvas-Jake concurs. Bands like Atheist, Cynic etc. stopped playing. I don't think that this style will be popular enough in the future. As I told you, the fans dislike the bands with this style, they prefer something more straightforward and aggressive. We saw that on our CD: many guys told us, "Great job, guys, really technical... but we prefer your old stuff just because it was more aggressive...". I agree that our music bridges the gap between technique and the brutality of Machine Head and Pantera, but maybe this doesn't appeal to the rest of the fans."



How did the fusion affinity come to pass, and how much do you let the other genres influence your music?

"We like many styles out of heavy metal generally. Jazz and fusion are some of those. I dare say

they influence our songs as [much as] death/thrash does. The most difficult thing is to find the way to put together all these things and to make something interesting. I don't say that we made it, only the fans know that."

Listening to some of your songs, there's even some folksy, 'ethnic' touches here and there, would you agree?

"I dare not say we have any ethnic influences in our music. Better [to say that] we didn't try to put some in. Generally I believe that the typical death metal musician dislikes something like that and of course he doesn't like to put it in his music. In music you can express almost everything, so if you want to express nationalism you can do it. You can make crazy mixes if you want to make something authentic. But at the end the fans are the ones who will accept it or not."

Needless to say. Turning now to the lyrical side of things, what's hot with you in that respect?

"We like to discuss rather human themes in our lyrics", he says. "We believe that the lyrics are as important as the music in a band. We try to create a 'human touch' by



presenting, in a rather psychological way, things that annoy us, things that make us feel like beasts or even some fantastic stories. This makes every song a separate 'piece'. Just because the lyrics have to do with humans, with the 'mankind' we had the idea to create the title Pieces of Mankind."

The band released a single some time ago, with something of a pessimistic tide. Tell me more about that.

"The phrase Apathy Murders Hope comes from ourselves.

We strongly believe [in] this meaning. About that 7"EP, we're still happy with that release. The fans all over the world loved this piece of vinyl. Now it's sold out, selling about 2,500 copies."

That's really not bad, now is it?

Greece is one of several European countries that still has compulsory military service. Did this take its toll on the band?

"Yes, we had to face that problem some years before", he admits. "You know, in Greece there is no alternative. Of course you can try not to do the military service but you'll have serious problems with the law. So we had to leave the band for about two years. I can't say we had any good gains by completing this service, it was a total waste of our time."

"We're preparing our new songs at the moment" Savvas-Jake concludes.

"Their style is a little different from Pieces..., brutal as Carcass and melodic like Dark Tranquillity. We'll make a promo-CD with three of them and we'll try to find a new label. We have the points to do something really good, to do our best. We hope everyone who will read this interview will get in touch with us."

ACID DEATH, P.O. Box 31902, 100 35 ATHENS, GREECE.



Thine. Great name for a band, that. They play some great music too, y'know. Let's see what vocalist Alan has to say for himself. After he had run off to get his glasses, I begun by asking him whether the band had put out anything other than a demo before the *Journeys* MCEP.

"That was it, that was the first ever demo", he begins abruptly.

"We did do a little secret one just for Hammy, somewhere down the line about two years ago, but that was just some piece of shit, nothing really. We've only just really appeared and done anything since that tape was recorded."

Was *Journeys* intended to be just another demo?

"No, with all the studio stuff we only intended them to be just for us, nobody else really."

How then, did Mr Black Tears get interested in releasing the thing?

"I used to write to him and get things off his distro so I told him about the band, and he said, 'Oh, send us a tape', so I did. And then he offered to release it and things went from there."

In the good old days bands would record three or so demos before they released anything 'official'. Does it matter that not many people heard of you before that tape came out?

"I don't know really, it works either way for some bands. I mean, as long as we have a good enough career in music I don't mind whichever way. I don't think it's gonna be the building up of a fanbase over a while, now it'll be the onset of Peaceville Records coming!"

Alan is obviously pleased with his band's being snapped up by Peaceville, seeing as he has mentioned it so early in the conversation. Let's face it, there can't be many English bands who wouldn't?

Back to *Journeys* though. At the time of asking the stuff is a year old, so are you still satisfied with everything?

"In a way, yeah" Alan hesitantly answers.

"We've changed style from the *Journeys* songs now, we're going a bit more mellow but more extreme, I think more extreme with the ideas of things, and starting to mellow out and just play music, instead of playing for an audience."

Alan tells me that by October 1997, the tape had sold some 550 copies. Was that impressive enough for him, and more generally, does it matter how many are sold? With being signed now, it's surely largely academic.

"Yes and no," he opines.

"I'm more bothered what people think of it. If we sold ten and got the good responses then that'd be OK, if we sold like a hundred and they're all bad responses it would be a bit of a shame. I like to listen to what people say about it really. It does come down to money though in the end, so if they do sell well and we get some money out of it that's cool."

Was it through contact with Hammy you got to record at Academy?

"Well, sort of through him. We've known him for a few years, and he just said one day, 'Why don't you get a grant and go in the studio, instead of doing it on a shitty little tape recorder', so we did."

I must admit that muggins here isn't too in-the-know as regards recording studio prices. Is it good value there, or ludicrously expensive?

"They have an unsigned demo rate, so it's expensive but not really expensive, I think it's about £15 an hour, which is still not cheap. We got a grant for it so we ended up paying £30 each, for three days, so it was alright."

One of the peculiarities of *Journeys* was the absence of bass guitar. Does Alan think *Thine* missed it?

"There's no bass guitar on either of the previous recordings", he states.

"Well we've just got one in now, for the *Mayhem* gigs and we're going to use him on the album, mainly because we've been pressured by Hammy. He's been saying we need it really, and we've asked a few people like Mags up at Academy to say what he thinks the sound is." On *Journeys*, the lack of low-end frequencies is compensated for by the powerful drum sound.

"Yeah", Alan agrees, "that was the idea of the mix. We put a bit more bass on the drums and also came up with a more basic guitar line when we were in the studio, so we sort of made up for it."

The band started off playing covers, particularly of those Viking black metal songs. What do you think about the *Storm/Isengard* comparison that came up with regard to *Journeys*?

"Maybe for the *Journeys* tape I can sort of see it, but for this new stuff there's no comparison at all. I think it's just mainly with the vocals, bits of it do sound sort of epic in a way. We do have the albums, we do like the *Isengard* ones but we never wrote them with [that] intention."

Alan nonetheless admits that he had heard the albums before *Thine* started composing:

"Oh yeah, we were quite impressed with the first album when that came out, but then we were quite young so, ha ha!"

Paul is the man who composes and writes lyrics, does Alan mind singing someone else's words?

"Well at the moment we're working more together", he corrects me.

"Paul comes up with the guitar stuff, so he does the basics of the song and then we work it from there, we add the drums in and everything later. And now me and Paul are sharing the lyrical duties, it's just all concepts and ideas, for the moment I thought we should keep it with Paul, keep that sort of flow until we get signed or something. Then we'll try and do a few other things, experiment a bit more, so that's what we are doing now."

Do you have many new vocal ideas then?

"Yeah, yeah, I think some of them are a bit insane in a way, but who cares!"

The man makes clear that his baritone singing style is being extensively reworked:

"Yeah, I've lost the lower tones more now; that's probably with me shouting, because I've been warned about that. I'm a bit more higher-pitched, I'm trying to experiment more really, because on the album I'm hoping to do a lot of harmonies and all sorts of weird backing stuff and different styles if I can; try to do it slightly like *Nick Cave* as well in some parts."

I thought that on the MCEP you were much more comfortable with the higher notes, the lower ones sounded a bit suspect.

"Yeah, that's alright," he chuckles, "I haven't been trained or anything singing-wise and I sing more at a higher pitch anyway, so with the lower notes it was more a case of not having long to learn them."

Admittedly, extreme metal vocalists are increasingly experimenting with sung vocals, however badly they may end screwing things up. Do you think that vocally, shouting or screaming is an easy way out?

"I don't know really, I've tried it myself. It depends because shouting and screaming fucks your throat up so I think there's some sort of work involved in both of them. I'm not really too sure on that!"

Action not Abstraction

The cassette EP didn't claim to rub any particular ideas in the faces of listeners, either in terms of lyrics or image. I wondered if there was however, any 'right way' of taking the lyrical on *Journeys*, which as they are seem rather abstract?

"No, not really, just images, there's no story or no nothing really", Alan answers.

At time of publication I still had not heard the new album, but the live airing of songs suggested a slightly softer agenda. Have the lyrics on the new album shifted conceptually?

"I think the case is [that] we get a basic idea of what we're going to write about, but with no real plot or anything, and then we write and then any meanings just come out after we've finished it; we don't really intend to put any in."

Alan is somewhat oblique here.

"There might be one or two lines where there's an intention in there, it's just whatever comes to us really."

Yogic Flying

At the time of the interview, *Thine* were nervously preparing for their support slots for *Mayhem*. Any butterflies, Alan?

"I'm worried! It's our first time live, so the one in London is going to be a fairly big gig, especially for us, so I'm sure it will all go down fine. We still haven't got a keyboardist yet, so we've got two weeks to find a keyboardist and learn them. But everything else is fine, we've got in a second guitarist and this new bassist, and we've just started learning them and everybody seems happy."

The chance to impress one thousand or so punters on a wider scale is not missed on the man:

"I think down in London there's going to be a fair bit of press as well," Alan adds, "so I'm looking forward to it."

Can all the synth stuff be played live?

"Well I think for this live gig we're just going to do simple backing stuff, and only the main bits where the keyboards actually stand out are playing solo. [We'll] just keep them as similar as possible to on the tapes, but otherwise we'll try and get them playing backing chords or something, just fill out the sound and ensure the presence. It's going to be a great experience for me!"

The band suffered from an awful sound, but for a first ever gig they scarcely put a foot wrong, Alan even showing off some painful-looking yogic back-bending jiggery-pokery!

Rest in Peace(ville)

One possible problem with *Thine's* future success is their total lack of image. There's nought wrong with that of course, but Alan acknowledges that it doesn't help shift records:

"That's one thing we've been talking to our label Peaceville about recently, Hammy's been saying we need to find an image for ourselves, he's been going: 'Image sells', and we just can't, we're not really bothered. We want to have an image like *Entombed*, just doing what we want, some guys who love to play music and we just do what we want really."

How much do you think image is related to personal expression?

"I think with some people it is personal expression but with others it's selling. It depends on who the person actually is, I know I've had my doubts about *Marilyn Manson* and bands like that. It's a bit dodgy is that one!"

I read about someone who stopped the guy at a gig and asked him why he looked like such a freak. His reply was simple but honest: "It makes money!" I do object to his being labelled as a man who as conquered himself, since he seems more to be trapped in his teenage hang-ups. Reading that he is some Nietzschean Superman is nothing but derisory.

Turning back to the matter in hand, what was the image on the *Journeys* cover? There didn't seem to be any-

thing depicted in the haziness.

"There was actually, it just came out wrong. We actually did it on the computer and sent it down to the printers and it came up on the screen the size of a postage stamp. The printers had to blow it up and it all became distorted. There was an image there though, it was sort of like an angel with fiery wings, but not an angel, just like something you'll see on *Babylon 5*, in the middle of space, flying next to a spaceship or something. It just came out all blurred and that spoils it really."

So is *Thine* pure escapism, or is there any message there at all?

"There's a few things with the lyrics which I'd like to point out to a few people, most people like; 'Open your minds, there's more out there', but that's more to society, that's like my parents or something, they're not into this music, they're into other things, and they don't open their eyes enough. Black metal's sort of like that, there are other things in life. I just like enjoy playing music, I want to do it, I've always wanted to do it really, and I can't be arsed doing anything else!"

Many will sympathise. Anyway, I detect a slight hankering for past times in the general *Thine* aesthetic. Not least in the name. Alan plays it down, however:

"I think it used to be a case of that but now more a case of slightly that idea but a different world, sort of like an inner something in your head; an inner earth or something and just separating from reality and just being able to lose yourself for a while."

Within your own mind, rather than in history?

"Yeah, and then you can go anywhere, you can go back to the Vikings, can't you, that sort of thing, so I think it's more of a case of that at the moment."

The songs for the full-length had already been penned at the time of our conversation, as Alan reveals.



"We've just written a full album, which is seven songs, and they're all the same length as the recorded songs. The blue tape with 'Reanimate the Mask' and 'Feathers and Roses' shows the changes and them two songs are appearing on the album, we recorded them in March this year. We're just

completely forgetting the *Journeys* songs, we've written a whole new album and we've got a few other songs in the pipeline. But we're getting to that stage at the moment where we get halfway through a song and we can't finish it," he laughs, "I think we've got a lot of things to concentrate on at the moment!"

Picking up on the problems *Thine* are having completing their tracks, I asked whether that was the trouble with long songs.

"Not really," Alan replies.

"I don't think so, the way we work with each other, if somebody gets stuck with something, another person will just jump in. It's just with some of these songs that we've only managed to half-finish, there's something there which we really like about it and it just rocks everything out, and it just gets to the point where you think, 'I can't better that... damn!'" he laughs, "and we just can't do anything about it so we ended up using a riff or two in another song, messing about with it."

Tell us about how the signing to Peaceville came to pass.

"We signed for five albums three weeks ago [early October 1997]. We were talking with Candlelight Records and a few smaller independent ones back in August but no, we're definitely signed to Peaceville now. We're going in January to record the first album, hopefully it'll be out in March we're going - in November after we've done the *Mayhem* gigs - to do the ten year anniversary Peaceville CD, which is old covers from each band, so we're going to do some covers."

At the time, Alan was in a quandary about what *Thine's* contribution would be.

"I don't know what we're going to do. The main idea is to choose something that's not really metal and 'metal it up', but there's a few terrible versions. You know *Dominion*, they've done 'Shout' and it's crap. They've got Michelle singing, and it's just crap really."

Fuck, who needs tact and diplomacy. Quite what that Yorkshire band are up to nowadays is anyone's guess. I don't think Alan cares anymore than I do.

Does he think the signing has come really quickly?

"We've known Hammy for a few years, we've constantly been talking about the band when we're with him, but we haven't said like, 'Hammy, sign us!'. It's more sort of, 'Oh, we're doing this you know', just sort of taking it friendly, not bothered about whether he wants to sign us or not. And then in August, I just phoned him up and said, 'Hammy, why don't you wanna sign us?', he said, 'I do!', so I said, 'Right, get contract sorted!', and he said, 'I will!'."

And lo, after six weeks in the studio, the debut *Thine* album appeared!

THINE, 39 RECTORY DRIVE, BURSTALL, WEST YORKSHIRE WF17 0PL, ENGLAND.



Sacramentum ought to be careful or they'll be branded as just another Swedish death/black metal band. If they haven't been already that is. Despite the release of a lukewarm second album on Century Media, Anders was positive about the reaction to *The Coming of Chaos*.

"I think the reaction has been overwhelming so far," says the guitarist, "everybody seems to enjoy the music we play on *The Coming of Chaos* album, so it's great."

The band recorded at Andy LaRocque's Gothenburg studio, and Anders doesn't have any misgivings about the experience, nor about the actual music penned.

"We worked on the songs for almost two years, and we have done our best in the studio, so we are satisfied with them."

And guess what? Century Media clearly aimed for a certain sound with the second album.

"Yeah, they wanted us to go to Woodhouse first", Anders admits, "but they would only allow us like two weeks in that studio and we felt more comfortable recording it in Gothenburg where we are. Andy LaRocque is a great guy, great producer, so we never regret that we chose that studio."

Would you say the new album is thrasher than the previous one?

"Yeah, it's at least a bit more technical, you could say."

Would you say, structurally, that it is simpler?

"Yeah. That's great too, there's no use just putting up a lot of riffs in a row with no meaning. I think it's better to concentrate on a few good riffs and a good structure."

The aggression is more focused on this one too?

"Yeah, that was the intention as well."

Far Away from the Sun was pretty hectic all the way through, but the new record isn't afraid of slowing down, is it?

"Yeah, I think you really need the contrast between slow and fast, because you don't appreciate the faster stuff if you don't have something slow to mix it up with. It just gets kind of monotonous, hearing blast beats for forty-five minutes."

Originally, vocalist Nisse was intended to do the talking, but a day's worth of interviews have left the man exhausted. Hence Anders taking up the slack. The guitarist isn't really that helpful when I ask whether there has been any lyrical change:

"Not really, just like some development, like perhaps more subtle and complex but in the same way they have developed with the lyric writer."

Sex with Satan

Without the keyboards and pretension espoused by so many '90s bands, **Sacramentum** are a black metal band only in concept. What does Anders think?

"Personally I would say like we are a metal band, but it is necessary to label the music because to describe to people what you play you can't just say you're just a metal band. We've always called ourselves a mixture between death and black metal ever since we started."

The \$64,000 question. Does black metal have to be Satanic?

"Well," Anders carefully opines, "what I can say is that the lyrical themes are more important in that way, but the important thing about the lyrics in black metal is that they should be sincere, and they should mean what they're singing about. That's the most important thing, and not if the lyrics are Satanic or Satanic in a more subtle way. It doesn't really matter. I think it's important that they stand for the lyrics and it is the same person who made the statement as they are in everyday life. That's the important thing."

I see, so in most cases the only ones who would be able to tell would be the persons concerned. Black metal *does* have a recognisable sound, so that is really the only point of reference.

Putting a similar question more directly, how much of an influence has Old Nick had on **Sacramentum**?

"Well, I guess Satanism is just the name for it, it's about the feeling and the force we have inside us and that is the true inspiration for the band. You can call it whatever you want, some people prefer to call it Satanism, some prefer calling it anything, a force, a god, or anything. A true evil force inside us that drives **Sacramentum** forwards."

Someone or other said in *AEON* magazine that if black metal turned its attention to sex, it would become a competition as to who could be the most perverse. I would argue that it's already happened. Even with **Sacramentum**. I asked Anders whether the whipping and female moaning in the song "Burning Lust" were sampled.

"No, it's actually recorded live", he says amusedly.

So what was going on?

"Some girls made the sounds for us and we added a whip to it, so it was recorded live, not a sample."

Is this a song about sex, perversion or what?

"Well, I think it's more about letting the true self out, more about that than just about simple sex. You can get the impression [it's about sex] at first but I think it's more about doing what you feel like and so on." Well, there you have it. Straight from the horse's mouth.

The song, "Abyss of Time" which is an instrumental, is uncharacteristically slow and depressing. What ideas inspired this?

"Before we entered the studio we talked about putting in the middle of the record some kind of break with a slower metal thing. I guess that song just developed in the studio the way it turned out. The impression was to get this funeral feeling about it."

At the end of the CD there's ten minutes of solid distortion, why did you do this?

"That was also one thing that just happened in the studio. It's just reverb that goes into feedback, and it grows and has kind of chaotic and evil sounds. We thought it fitted well with the concept of the album. You can say in some way it's the demons that reflect the coming of chaos and it also symbolises our impression of the coming of chaos. The chaos comes and takes over the world and cleans

everything else. And also the emptiness of the words, it grows almost by itself so we kept it because it fitted so well with the concept."

The cover art reflects the chaotic approach; a swirl of garish colour with no form discernible whatsoever. Anders states that it was also a question of changing things a little:



"We would have liked to have something a little bit different from all this kind of paintings."

Bored of Kristian Wählin then?

"Yes, we used his stuff before, so we tried to do something different and it fitted the concept of the album as well so..."

Voicing the Vision

Sacramentum go back further than many of their fellow countrymen. After the recording of one demo, the young, rough-around-the-edges band were signed to Adipocere. Was Anders satisfied with the French label's handling of the album and the first mini-CD?

"The problem about that guy [Vincent] - for us at least - is that he doesn't do anything for the bands like promotional stuff. He doesn't care if he sells however many records, he just does the release and then leaves it, you know. So for me at that time it was OK, but after we recorded the full-length we would have liked more support from a record label and we realised that Adipocere were not able to do that for us."



With Century Media the band can expect more support.

"Yeah," Anders agrees, "it is a total difference, you notice the difference at once, you know."

How many albums did the band sell of the first full-length?

"I'm not sure because he doesn't give us any numbers at all. He told me last time that it sold like 6 or 7,000 or something."

It could have been worse. Said album was a tad underrated, coming as it did with a wave of new black metal bands from Scandinavia. The complicated melodicism made *Far Away from the Sun* something of a bewildering, though ear-catching record. Anders seemed pleased enough with the band's first release, the mini-CD and the aforementioned full-length.

"Well, I mean I think they are very good, representing **Sacramentum** at that time. I don't like to deny anything I've done. For many bands, they say, 'Oh the first shitty release, I hate it!', you know. I think it's OK."

There's a song you did called *The Vision and the Voice* - what's that about?

"That lyric is about dreams," he explains curtly, "a dream Nisse had, I can't explain it very well exactly but it's about a vision, you could say."

No connection with the Aleister Crowley work with the same title?

"No."

Just wondering...

Live and Kicking

Sacramentum did a couple of gigs with English band **Infestation** and cult Greek bunch **Rotting Christ** in the UK. Originally **Borknagar** were supposed to be playing, so how short notice were Anders and company called in?

"I think it was two or three weeks or something like that."

What did he feel about the London gig then?

"That was like the second gig on the tour and

it was very chaotic with the sound and everything; a lot of technical stuff was against us, but actually it was at least one of the biggest crowds of the tour, that made it OK really."

One wonders if he doesn't actually think that it sucked. Witnessed from the moshpit, **Sacramentum** put up a decent performance, the guitarist sporting a particularly hirsute visage if I remember correctly.

Does Anders have a favourite gig of the whole tour?

"I think the gigs in Holland, and especially Slovenia, were very cool. You know, in Slovenia it's hard to get over across the border and when the band comes, because they come so rarely everybody comes to the show, it was cool."

Did the crowds like the new material?

"They were impressed with the new stuff because they thought it was much better than the earlier [songs]. It's always good to hear from old metalheads that have been around always in the metal scene. They like the aggression and the rawness in the new songs, they know what's it about and that's what we try to create with music."

Liber Kaos

Returning to the chaotic imagery of the latest album, I asked Anders if this attitude applied to his worldview. Is humanity headed for chaos?

"Yeah, look at the world around us today, I think it's pretty obvious that we will go into a more chaotic state, that probably and hopefully will end in total chaos."

I can only hope that **Sacramentum** will be there to enjoy the ride. With this worship of entropy and the chaos star printed on the CD, I guess the trio are influenced by chaos magick?

"Not very much actually", Anders says, "because...well, it has the same feeling about it because it's about chaos as a force, as you could call Satan a force."

I don't think we're going to get anymore out of the man on that one. This guy makes quieter interviewees seem positively garrulous when he hits a topic he doesn't feel confident with. Let's try a different tack.

Your drummer, Niklas Rudolfsson, plays also in **Deathwitch**. It doesn't concern Anders that the tall sticksman has his bit on the side.

"If we ever had that problem we would arrange things otherwise but for us it's no problem. I think it's both good and bad for creativity, but as long it doesn't take the main band away, I don't care. You know, he gets an outlet for creativity he can't get an outlet for in **Sacramentum**."

"I think everything goes around", he intones when I ask him about his views on the retrothrash thing.

"It's time for thrash and perhaps in a few years old-school death metal will come back, then black metal will come back again. Every time it comes back it comes back in another shape. The sad thing about retrothrash is it's just cloning the music of the 80s, but they don't capture the feeling so it's totally pointless." Tell me about it.

Anders does reveal that he keeps up with current metal releases:

"I prefer the music of the '80s actually, but some new releases I appreciate as well. **Arcturus** is one of my '90s favourite bands but I wouldn't call it black metal, it has nothing to do with black metal, it's just music. I don't even know if it's metal."

How does he feel about the reformation of **Mayhem**?

"Well I don't mind, and I don't think I care either. If they think they have something to contribute to the scene, I think they should go on and do it."

Tell us Anders, why is the Swedish scene of the 1990s so hyperactive?

"I think it's a bit of a tradition I suppose, to start a band because everybody does it. There's no scene in Sweden because there's nobody listening to the music and nobody really buying the records, just a lot of bands, and no places to play live or anything - unless you're in Gothenburg - so it's a pretty strange situation."

Isn't there a danger of complete meltdown?

"Yeah of course, but it works like everything else, the strongest will survive."

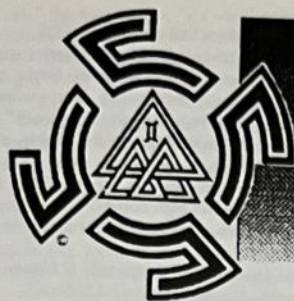
Having recorded *The Coming of Chaos* in June, Anders told me that, at the time of interview, he planned a rest after the tour before new stuff would be written.

"I think", he says when I ask him about a likely future direction, "it will be more aggressive but at the same time more melancholic."

Let's just hope it possesses more vitality than the last one.

"A lot of bands say they are extreme and so on," Anders concludes, "[but] they just have a lot of synthesizers with nice melodies. If you listen to **Sacramentum**, you will just have pure aggression and rawness."





reviving and understanding Europe's ancient heritage and regions

BÆLDER

THE PAN-EUROPEAN FRATERNITY OF KNOWLEDGE



The Circle of Jormungandr

Politics and music should never mix, some will say. The fact is that they often do, from **Chumbawumba** on the left across to **Graveland** on the right. There can't be just a small number who think that, ideologically-speaking, black metal was the worst thing that ever happened to extreme music. However, I see little reason for sweeping everything under the carpet; it's at least cowardly to avoid questioning it all at some point.

The Circle of Jormungandr was established two years ago in an attempt to join "the struggle for European survival and further aid in the great work of revealing and realising Western Destiny." In practice, the COJ (to which the organisation will be shortened through this feature) is an organisation publishing reams of (often fascinating) essays, varying in topic from natural heathenism to European history and occultism. The organisation (which admits members on the basis of a questionnaire application form) states that it is non-political, despite the fact that its ideology would clearly suggest the inauguration of certain policies. It is also affiliated to other projects run from Amsterdam in The Netherlands, most importantly the Order of the Jarls of Bælder (hence the logo above). The Circle proclaims itself anti-Christian and born within the context of the black metal scene.

I contacted Tom Reinders and he agreed to tell me a little more about what he believed in. After sending some questions across the Channel, the man replied, congratulating me on "excellent, critical interview questions" and promising to answer them as soon as possible. He further stated that he realised that the COJ "needed to undergo further changes and development" and that my "critical examination of our statements affirmed this awareness". He seemed honest enough about it all, but after a large delay he sent some answers back, not all as he had hinted, with a note that he wasn't entirely pleased with his statements. Furthermore, his printer run out of ink midway through the print-out, much to his embarrassment. Understandably so: it's a little disconcerting that an organisation that apparently strives for "elitism" can't bring itself to tackle questions it states are "the best ones received so far". Anyway, read on. The interview was left in question-and-answer format due partly to Tom's abandonment of particular questions and partly because it seemed sensible to format the interview. Track down the Spengler and Nietzsche if you wish, but draw your own conclusions.

We are all aware of the elements of stupidity in the black metal scene, but do you find like me that a worrying aspect of many bands' philosophies/ideologies is the negativity often expressed? Bandmembers portray themselves as nihilistic, aimless individuals wallowing in depression. This is contrasting sharply with your Faustian evolutionary dynamic, and the playing of life as a game at full tilt. Is black metal too life-negating, or is this merely symptomatic of the dualistic inverted-Christian elements?

"I agree fully with everything you say, but the funny thing is that especially those who are most extreme in hailing their own wickedness are the ones most likely to come down the hardest when they get confronted with the real world and come to the conclusion that they have behaved like clowns. Hohoh! The COJ recruited from within the black metal scene, but it was never our intention to reinforce any ideas they took with them that developed because they were listening to black metal. The COJ had a purpose, which it fulfilled (of which black metal was only the means we used, sorry) and because it now has accomplished this, it grows further to the next stage, which is more or less more underground-based instead of our former role. That's why, unfortunately, some of your questions regarding COJ are no longer relevant and I did not answer them. Getting back to black metal, I learned that the whole mentality that has infused this genre more so suffocates individual self-expression than that it champions you to seek new levels of being and understanding. Why? Because it (Satanism, misanthropy, racism or whatever) fully relies on (very deeply) Christian thinking."

You are keen in your documentation to emphasise the "Faustian evolutionary dynamic", without really ever pointing to what this means practically. What can the reader understand by those words?

"It refers to the active principle of what is termed "aeonics" or "epochanics"; a theory that incorporates a strong sense of "destiny" and which seeks to uncover the underlying patterns of history to make the interaction between man and the society he's part of more conscious. This outlook involves pragmatic thinking and placing the individual in the service of greater evolutionary forces. It is believed that Western man can play a conscious role in the actual course of the unfolding of this epoch, because of his unique capacity to create and sustain genuine civilisation, hence "Faustian", referring to the well-known legend/symbol Dr. Faust."

Much of the literary stuff on self-overcoming sounds nice, like an occultist's self-improvement book even. It's a lot harder to turn the theory into practice, though. What general advice

would you give to a young European on a general level to ensure continual development, improvement and perfection of the persona?

"As far as my advice goes to anyone reading this interview, don't believe anything I say; create your own truths and live life without conformity."

Reading many published articles in journals such as Bælder and Winter War, it seems to be confusing where you stand on individualism, which is often confused with materialism. Surely healthy individualism is crucial to development of ambitious and independent minds? Many other countries have a well-defined culture but lack the expression of individuals because of 'nanny states' regulating their activity. Surely 'free' European countries are the most fertile due to their structure, which unlike Iran for example, allow self-expression? There's more scope for personal ingenuity in the former.

"European countries allow self-expression only to the extent that it allows you to repeat anything you are programmed to think and say, so this indicated how much I appreciate all this talk about 'individualism' ("image is nothing, trust your instincts" etc.) and 'freedom'. Real democracy has for long been replaced by a hypocritical and parasitic form of democracy, which has placed egoism as its centre of worship, so in this sense supposed individualism is simply the same as egoism. Individualism means responsibility and if people cannot handle their 'freedom' then that 'freedom' either has to be replaced by less freedom, a resurgence of authority as some have suggested, or a different form of freedom, which can handle individuals saying whatever they want to say."

The COJ started off as a male-only group, but why? Was that not a very patriarchal and dualistic approach to have? What made you change your mind and allow females in, was COJ in need of the fairer sex as a balance factor?

"The COJ never started off as a male-only group. Females are and were always encouraged to contact us. I think you refer to the Order of the Jarls of Bælder, which was initially founded by males, but also never aimed for a male-only group; it just happened to start off like this. In fact, Bælder always encouraged females as well. All of the groups that are affiliated to the Arktion Federation are open for females and there is also a group, named Deorc Eorde Sweostor, that is open only to women (though selected males are invited to serve as bonded acolytes)."

So, let us agree by saying that indeed, 'Satan is dead'. Would we not also agree that we can dispose of superstitious idea of gods, unfounded points of occultism, and the like. Are the magical aspects of the COJ merely a convenient and irresponsible (since it is so vague) way of filling the gaps and avoiding the fall into nihilism?

"I definitely agree with you that a lot of what passes off as 'occultism', 'magick' etc. can be disposed of, because much basically is indeed worthless and shallow. Nihilism can be tempting, but would be truly irresponsible and shallow, a reflection of this deteriorated age. Rationalism and materialism create the gaps you are talking about; magick is essentially based upon irrational principles and observations and does not need to be an excuse to further widen these gaps as it often does lead the individual further way from real explanations etc. I wouldn't talk of 'magickal aspects', because I see everything originating from the source of magick, whereby magick itself implies self-awareness and the cultivation of this consciousness. The COJ itself is an act of sinister magick that extends beyond its own existence; it affects the ones involved and the ones it reached. We have a purpose, a mission; we don't need to legitimise ourselves being a magickal group, we simply live it."

Do you feel the main reason for the disinterest in Western Magick, as opposed to more new age Oriental forms (from yoga to feng shui and Buddhism) because of the way the former was expressed through Nazism in 1930s Germany? Would you concede that your use of magickal and mystical terms is an attempt to move people emotionally, as opposed to rationally and intellectually? If so, is this not dangerous?

"Nazism has unfortunately left many with an uncomfortable feeling when they are today faced with rune magick or even innocent German mythology, it's crazy. People seem to think that because aspects of our and their own heritage were used by the Nazis, it gives them reason to condemn the material all together, which reveals their profound stupidity and lack of

unbiased thought. It's alright to study non-Western ideas as a Westerner, but ignorant to identify with stuff that is not your own. About your other question, to work consciously you start off at an emotional, psychological level in order to produce change. Any action that originates from the instinctual or emotional must be backed up intellectually and rationally, otherwise it indeed could become dangerous. Magick, however, does not oppose the rational, as working magick simply means making conscious that which before was unconscious; realising one's potential and opportunities, rationalise, understand, integrate."

Quoting from one of your articles; Racialism vs. Racism (aren't they the same?), it is stated that "Racialism is Nature's dictate". From a genetic, biological standpoint this is highly questionable. For a start, Nature has endowed me with desire for the opposite sex, but that is not an excuse to rape whomever I wish. We surely are no longer powerless subjects of Nature anyway. Although it is of course certain that geographical features have moulded the races in the way they are, it seems a muddy foundation for any political philosophy?

"I don't really get what you're trying to say, but I reckon you say that the idea of 'racial purity' is hard to back up from a biological perspective? I'm aware that history has moulded racial groups and subgroups as well as created new ones by disintegrating previous existing ones and that we cannot speak about any real 'racial purity'. However, I don't believe that arguments to build a new approach or form of racialism (which would re-establish in each European a sense of belonging, identity and destiny) can, nor should, be found in modern doctrines that are agents of materialism and propagate racial suicide (do you?), but rather in revolutionary ideas that assures out spiritual unity and imperatives. Racialism goes beyond mere biological facts and seeks to make conscious again the fact that we, as Europeans, are unique and have a common destiny, a common mission, that includes only the race of Europe. A member of any other race will never be able to identify with our destiny and cannot be moved by the same Spirit as we are, because he's part of another race and culture and historical background. This can be discussed in great length I'm afraid, but let me add that race is not the foundation of our philosophy; spirit is. Spirit is the engineer of culture and race its building blocks. Without racial awareness we lose our humanity, as simple as that. The modern world with its internationalism is evidence enough of this I would think."

Is racial mixing really in the interest of "alien forces", as you often point out? Isn't it merely because multiculturalism is fashionable in the chattering classes at the moment.

[Here, the answer Tom had started to give had been crossed out.]

The aforementioned article states that in order for evolution, "fundamental differences between the great races need to be maintained". This is incorrect: evolution acts on all races as well as on a homogeneous community. Also, the races are already so intermixed that the whole issue of racial purity is now ridiculous, isn't it?

"I think I have already answered most of your criticism above. Championing racial diversity all evolves around the insight one has into the current historical situation (as well as depending on instinct and a life-affirming empathy with nature, including its most fundamental rules) and the judgement that follows from it is based again upon what it has taught you about should be injected into the masses and what should be undermined, countered. Pragmatics does not necessarily imply that you ignore any 'facts' (as I explained already), but that you work with them according to epochal insight and will."

COJ introductory leaflets are eager to stress that the organisation is not political. Why do you stress this, when from other articles you clearly sympathise with certain broad political perspectives? Would you not gain from using political might? This could also be used to re-align education on a wider scale, could it not? Would you allow membership to a strict communist/socialist?



"The reason we distance ourselves so clearly from any politics is exactly because of the fact that many people cannot see our role and think we are running a political agenda of some sort, which we clearly do not. Because of this prejudice we must stress this to avoid misinterpretations and misunderstanding. Of course, you can start to debate the definition of what politics actually is, but basically we view modern politics as no real option to change anything, both because of the fact that our present-day political climate doesn't allow this and because politicians have no real power anyway, and the COJ has no aspirations to become politically-motivated. We seek to contribute to a greater, spiritual revolution, which could manifest itself well by means of a political form, and support those principles which we view as valuable to reach our causes, if they are politically-tinted or not, we don't care. I can't really immediately imagine that somebody who is a communist/socialist and determined about his beliefs will find himself attracted to us in the first place, but if anyone has an open-minded attitude and thinks we can be of use to him and he to us, we really don't care about his former ideas."

Aryanism and 'Aryan living' are words and phrases that crop up often in COJ literature - you may wish to clarify you don't mean blonde-haired, blue-eyed individuals, but people with a European cultural backbone. Do you worry about people getting the wrong idea what with the gammadion imagery; the sunwheel in the Bælder logo and all this Aryan stuff?

"Alright, we don't refer to this standard image when we use the term 'Aryan'. About Bælder's logo; perhaps it gives a good indication that we are an organisation that does not follow any old dogma, or can be easily labelled as such and such. We tread only the path we have laid out for ourselves and [don't] give a fuck about other people's attempts to pinpoint us with inane labels. The Arktion Federation embodies revolutionary forms and is thus not a reactionary movement and thus does not compromise with the sickness of this age. If some people start screaming because we have chosen to use a most ancient and powerful pagan symbol to represent our spiritual and historical awareness, then that is sad, but nothing to do about. They are not ready yet to come to terms with what we offer, which perhaps will only be fully realised, and implemented on a greater scale, in the future. We are a PAGAN movement, but as a totality (our groups, projects, initiatives etc.) represent something much greater that unfortunately few can yet understand."

Please explain the ideas behind the Jomsberg Community as a self-sufficient entity. What do you think of the many right-wing, 'self-sufficient', tax-dodging militias which are operating particularly in the United States?

"I think these self-styled militias are a noble idea, even though they are unlikely to inflict any real change in society. Nevertheless, they act at least, expressing their opposition against the System and finding an alternative. The ideas behind forming the Jomsberg Community are based upon self-sufficiency, empathy with the land, living apart from heading-to-disaster society and basically restoring the pagan ethos of our ancestors by living out in a very real and direct way this pagan, natural, way of life. The Jomsberg Community is, however, not an escape from society, rather an attempt to create anew by setting up an alternative, an example. When established, then only a start is made; it's not the end itself. It will be a beginning, a seed for something greater, and a major achievement if I may add."

There you have it, a somewhat truncated view of the COJ from Tom Reinders. He did not, as I emphasised earlier, provide answers to many of the questions; whether COJ was not merely another of the "self made élites" and "cosy cults" it decides, whether COJ trumpeted about the "war" with Christianity too much instead of true self-overcoming, an explanation of this vague term "destiny" and whether their worldview was too romantic and reactionary. Amongst other things. Many aspects of COJ literature are worryingly vague, especially in the hands of uninformed people, and though I can't deny that there are worthy points in the general picture, there are few reasons why we should take these organisations too seriously.

Postscript: A letter arrived from Tom at the beginning of October in which he stated that the COJ's "structure is pretty dead" and that this is partly due to "changes involving personal and philosophical reorientation". He goes on to say that he no longer agrees with everything as stated here. Behold the power of investigative journalism!

COJ, MEER EN VAART 382, 1068 LH AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS.



Forlorn are one of the most promising Norwegian acts to have popped their noses over the parapet. Don't yawn and turn the page; I know it sounds boring, but stay put because these guys are really something. Something good. Viking-styled metal is their game, and they have an MCD and a full-length, *The Crystal Palace* out now on Head Not Found Records. Alvarin agreed to an interview, so after a

couple of telephone calls to a confused younger sister and one "Jeg snakker ikke Norsk", the man is explaining how the **Forlorn** experience came to fruition:

"Well, basically it was a project," the man says in his amusingly musical voice, "a couple of years ago, me and C. Worhn used to play in this other band called **122 Stab Wounds**. That was a death metal band, I made some music that didn't fit into the death metal concept and so from there it emerged. Later on C. Worhn joined **Stab Wounds**, we came together, he had the same ideas as me. I was pretty fascinated by Viking stuff and all that. You can say now we feel we're a band, as opposed to a project."

He goes on to explain how one Sanrabb entered the equation: "Actually, he came and asked us a couple of years ago. He heard from a friend of ours who lived close by, so he heard some stuff and he wondered if he could join. We weren't quite certain, because we hadn't an album out, **Gehenna** was pretty large, and we had second thoughts about it; we knew people and magazines would focus on Sanrabb and not the music maybe, that's what we feared. Anyway he had pretty cool musical ideas, so we took him in, he has a great voice as it turned out, so he's in the band now."

As is apparent from Alvarin's last answer, he was wary of **Forlorn** being branded merely as Sanrabb's plaything. Things have developed and our man knows it.

"Yeah," he agrees, "from now it will be a band, we've had discussions with Sanrabb. We had discussions with Sanrabb told him we actually thought of hiring him, because eventually **Gehenna** and **Forlorn** would crash. We figured a way out so we could do both things, because C. Worhn's also in **Gehenna**."

Alvarin and company can scarcely have chosen a worse name in as far as avoiding those already taken.

"Actually, first time I heard anybody else called **Forlorn** was many years ago. You see, the project itself is very old; I was 16 when I developed the **Forlorn** concept and now I'm 22, so for me it's very old. It was actually an Italian who told me so I didn't bother, I don't bother now."

There's a death metal band so named in America and a doomier one in Sweden I believe.

"Funny thing is we got a letter from this lady we write to in France, and she had heard a **Forlorn** song, she thought it was so cool she wondered why we didn't use it on the album. And it's not our song! Goddamn!"

His former band, **122 Stab Wounds**, played some murderously intense death, and so the name was rather fitting. Does Alvarin have good reasons for **Forlorn** as an adopted name? Is there a meaning there?

"Total coincidence", he reveals. "When I was 16, I played around with names, logos and drawings. I figured I'd just point my finger somewhere in a book, and that should be it. Luckily it's not bad, I looked at it and, at the time I was alone, a project of mine besides the other band long before C. Worhn had started the other band. You know, 'forlorn' means desolate and abandoned so it fitted me pretty cool then. When C. Worhn and Sanrabb joined, we did think about changing it because maybe it didn't fit anymore."

The funny thing is that the music is much more 'happy' than the band name suggests?

"Yeah exactly, that made it pretty cool, I mean, the band **Death** don't sound like death", he deadpans. "Whenever we made music we didn't think of us making a happy song, making a sad song, it just happens naturally."

Stabbing Northward

I asked Alvarin whether there was a lot of contact with Metalion before the signing. I had overlooked the fact that the *Deity of Perversion* (**122 Stab Wounds**) album was put out by the man himself.

"That's a very funny thing!" he chuckles. "As I said before, we play in another band, and we had a deal with Head Not Found for one record. We did the record; it didn't sell too many, about 1,000 copies so it wasn't what we expected. Anyway, we live in Stavanger, Head Not Found is in Oslo [Sjorsborg being a suburb] and when I was at a concert in Oslo, with **Slayer** and all this, we always went to see the big bands. There we met Metalion, who I talked to a lot, and I explained about the project **Forlorn**, but he was too drunk to listen to what I told him. Anyway, me and C. Worhn, we had this recorder in our room with a 2-track, so he got a very shitty tape; we taped it and asked him how what he felt about it and if he could possibly find us a demo or something. All we had was a drum machine and one guitar, and so it's very raw. Anyway, he wrote back and gave us a deal for three records. We were like, "Oh yeah, we'll do this!" We didn't have any expectations of getting a deal, we had never made a demo, we had never practised, so it's very coincidental."

The guitarist says that the first mini-CD could easily have been a full-length because of pressure from Jon Metalion.

"He wanted, but we didn't [want a full-length]. Actually we had a lot of problems with that because we only made an EP first, so Head Not Found put their foot down. We're not going to release two little songs, with little playtime. We're not going to release two little songs, with little playtime. We said, "Well OK, fuck you", and that's us arguing. They said they gave us more money to record than we needed, but actually we needed even more, so we released it and it sold pretty well. That's the reason we wanted to do well, the EP is our demo, we have never been the three of us in a studio, we wanted to

check out how it was."

What feedback have **Forlorn** had on the mini-CD?

"It's been very good, I haven't heard one negative comment yet. I met some people who think it's maybe too happy - one song is a pretty happy song - but we were happy with it. So, that's the most negative experience."

Alvarin recognises that feedback is hardly reliable, and almost always over-positive. "Yeah," he says, "that's dangerous in a way. When we released the full-length we had high hopes."

It was good ole Garm who mastered the five-song mini-CD. "He phoned me and asked what we wanted. If I knew I'd probably do it myself. He did a good job I believe."

Baptised in Fire and Ice

The mini-CD (unfortunately I have yet to check out the latest full-length) did not suffer as much as it could have done through the lack of a drummer.

"Actually, we're now rehearsing with one. We're going on a tour hopefully, so we need a drummer!"

A lot of people will recognise the **Bathory** influence to the music, some of the screams in "Heroes" remind one very much of Quorthon.

"Well you're right", Alvarin agrees. "They were meant to be, we worked on that particular part of the song for four or five hours, to make it like Quorthon. Of course our music is definitely influenced by **Bathory**, this is my major influence musically, and you can hear it in our music."

Whilst the musician makes no bones about his admiration



for the Swedish act, but it would not go amiss to point out that in no way is **Forlorn** a mere clone.

"I don't know," he says when I ask him what **Forlorn** have that others haven't, "the studio we go to, the technician there is excellent. He has to find the right choirs, the right synths and keyboards to make the sounds more varied. A lot of people make music [that sounds] similar to each other, but the sound has so much to say, it's the power behind the choir, how much weight you put on that particular Viking theme. **Enslaved** don't bother too much with Viking music; if you measured them against **Bathory**, it's not as Viking."

The middle track on the MCD, "Drommefanger" is devoid of Sanrabb's crooning, and has a definite sleigh-ride feeling to it's gentle strains. I put it to Alvarin that this was far, far away from the often depressive tones favoured by many.

"Actually it's not a happy song, but a different song than what's usual for our kind of band. The song began as a country song; we were bored, we play country or boogie,

whatever, so we have a great laugh. Maybe we'd watched a country movie before that", he laughs. "It's very funny, we play all the classics. When it came to the studio we recorded it for a laugh. I sat down with the keyboards, there were so many cool sounds there, from there it evolved to what it became. It's funny that way."

He's right. The song is not at all out of character with the other songs and has a definitively evocative air.

"Yeah," Alvarin agrees, "you get a good feeling I would claim by listening to that song. It doesn't make you necessarily happy."

Is the Viking theme something that will be employed all the way through **Forlorn**'s releases?

"I don't know. We really don't try to make a Viking song or make a black [metal] song. We make songs naturally, we've never sat down and said "Let's make a song", so I really can't tell. Of course the Viking theme has helped us evolve, we're trying to go a bit further. The future's very exciting if you think of it that way. You never know, but of course the choirs and all that we will keep, the acoustic guitars which we use a lot, we'll keep that also."

As Kola Krauze pointed out in his one-off *Authent* hatezine, there are now Italian bands singing in the Nordic language.



"Yeah," the man laughs, "it's very interesting you know, bands from Italy or Switzerland and so forth. It's pretty funny, I suppose it's kinda cool that Italians think about being a Viking. I can't say, "What do they know about being a Viking", because I don't know. I mean, I'm a thousand years behind. If they've got this feeling, OK, but singing in Norwegian is taking it one step too far. We are trying to write in English because it's the international language and of course we want people to understand what we're singing about so they don't have to look it up in a dictionary. I heard of one band, I can't remember what the name was..."

Ugluk perhaps?

"...they took a dictionary and just took Norwegian words that sounded cool in English, like 'mountains', 'valleys', 'fjords', and it became like 'the valley-mountain-fjords' in Norwegian, it's very silly. Gehenna told me when they were on tour many bands came and introduced themselves in Norwegian, they spoke a little Norwegian even."

Maybe the Norwegian tourist board owes the black metal scene something, with all these fans coming to Elm Street and seeing where the big boys play.

Æsir and Vanir

People from Scandinavia tend to romanticise the Viking period, but what does modern man have to learn from this time?

"Interesting question. What I'm personally trying to do is to take a bit of the Viking era, draw it to where we are, and take it further so that people don't forget. I can mention how Christianity came to our country, not just the Viking stuff, everybody in that period was very proud, they stood up. That's the lesson we should learn, to still be able to tell a person, "Fuck you", to take a stand in any way."

Mainly honesty then?

"Yeah," Alvarin continues, "honesty and honour and promising. That made the Vikings great as they seem to be."

The lyrics of the song "Ærefull Ferd" talk about it being honourable to die in battle. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori. Is this more a nostalgic nod to the warriors, or is the man bold enough to state that there is honour there too. "That's funny you should ask, I actually saw a TV show last night."

Really? Whatever next? Sorry, carry on and I'll stop playing the fool.

"The song is explaining ære, and you know we have to be correct. The Vikings took incredible honour, it was dishonourable not to die in battle; they couldn't come to Valhalla if they didn't die in battle, pretty miserably for them. Personally I guess I would rather die fighting for something than in a car crash." What would Alvarin fight for then?

"If there was a war, of course I wouldn't go and fight for my country" he answers. "I would fight for my family, fight for my own rights. Most people would I believe."

It's refreshing to hear that the man doesn't go for the more renowned names when I ask him which god (or if he likes, goddess) of the Norse pantheon he relates to personally.

"I've done some research to the Viking era. I haven't done it accurately; my history teachers told me what they think when they hear my last name. They came to the conclusion that my family comes from the middle of Norway; Trondheim. In that Viking era, my blah-blah-blah-great grandfather was some kind of chief. They lived in a valley, and it blew a lot; my name means 'King of Winds' in English. I did a lot of checking and there is a god, who lives in a valley and hunts, his name is Ullr. I could identify right there and then. I couldn't identify with Odin or Thor, the great ones as it were, that everyone goes around and identifies themselves with. You have to be pretty smart to be able to identify with Odin, very wise and moralistic. Very few in this world can identify with him really. Thor, maybe he was the most worshipped god in all of Scandinavia, of course he appealed to the farmers, and a lot of people, maybe more people today."

In Viking mythology there's the Ragnarok, but does Alvarin think the end of humanity will be similarly short and violent?

"All great religions have their own name for the end," he muses, "I'm pretty much a non-believer, but I'm fascinated by the Viking era. I don't know, I believe we are driving ourselves to the end, with pollution and so on. But I believe if we are good enough to fuck it up, we are good enough to fix it. There are people smart enough to find a way. Maybe in 300 years we'll be living on Jupiter, so it won't matter anyway."

What's the story with the symbol on the inside back cover of the CD?

"The thing in the middle, that's a raven. Odin had two ravens; Hugin and Mugin, who saw and heard everything and told him. I wanted to use a raven, not because we see and hear everything, but it's there symbolically; it sees and hears and tells us, we get feedback that way. The three lines actually represent something, an actual symbol of the Viking era. I don't know which is which, but it means the three parts of the world, like we would say Heaven, Earth and Hell. They had Utgard, Midgard and Asgard, so it's very symbolic; the beginning, life and the end, death. It's a very natural symbol."

Alvarin doesn't think that success as a musician is anything other than personal satisfaction:

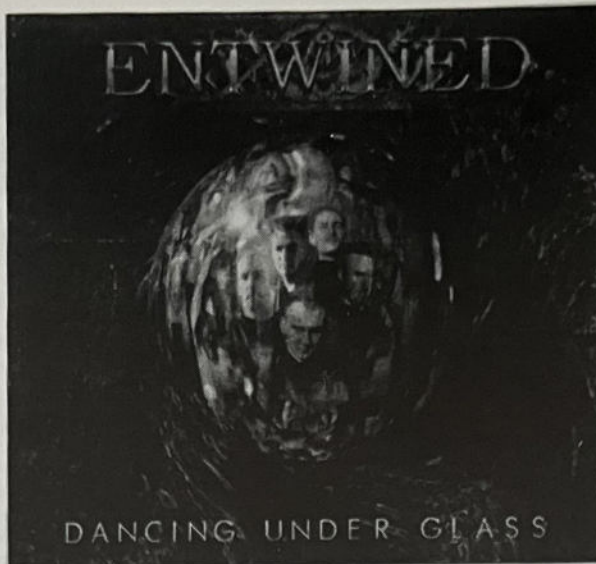
"The day you can make a song at home and put it on the tape recorder, listen to it and honestly say to yourself that you really like it, that there's nothing to be improved. Which is very rare; you always find something to improve later. That's when you're truly satisfied, and when we're satisfied that's success personally. Of course, a million dollars wouldn't hurt!"

He's clearly doubtful, if not a total disbeliever, of whether that sort of success is ever possible:

"Maybe if you make one song, you listen to it ten times it sounds fine, you listen one hundred times, you [want to] change a few things. There's always new ideas. Sometimes we take our tapes and play them backwards, just to see if there's something cool or even really catchy, and sometimes there is. We use that to maybe make other songs, in that way we inspire ourselves. You can never be totally satisfied."

An ingenious circular compositional method. The man ends the chat with a brief manifesto for the forthcoming months.

"We've just begun rehearsing, because our next album will have to be better. We are trying to find the right people to join the band. We're going on a tour late in the year I hope, it's pretty complex since we've never rehearsed nor played live or anything. We have one more record to do for Head Not Found, that's the last record in our deal, then we need a new one. I don't know, that's basically our plan. We've been offered some other contracts and of course when the time comes we have to sit down and talk to each one."



With the release of *Dancing under Glass*, British metallers **Entwined** are looking to go far. I had a long chat with vocalist and rhythm guitarist Stephen Tovey, just after the band had left the studio. The man told me he could talk for England, and so I've left my intrusions to a minimum. Bear in mind that the band have recently parted company with keyboardist Mark Royce.

Incidentally if these guys do get big, this is the very first interview with them as a band with an album recorded, so remember where you read it! Surprisingly, the up-and-coming youngsters (oo-erl) didn't go to Academy. Stephen picks up the story:

"No, we went to, it's kind of like a new studio in a way. The engineer, Guy Russell (he engineered a few things for Simon Efemy), knows this small studio out in the middle of nowhere, near Northampton called Far Heath. We didn't know the name of the studio until about three days beforehand. We went there for a couple of weeks."

And so how did the recording go?

"Really well, it was quite cool. Everything came out ten times better than we thought it was going to. We were so surprised at how well it came out, we thought we had a small budget over a couple of weeks; we thought we would get an alright sort of sound, but from what we've heard it sounds really good, the guitar sounds nice and big and everything's powerful." Efemy's done a lot of big names (**Paradise Lost** etc.), so how was it like to work with him? Did he understand exactly what you wanted to do?

"I can't praise the guy enough to be honest, he's a really good motivator. He had an idea, came down to rehearsal before we went to the studio, spoke to us about what sort of sound we wanted, arranged for some equipment to be rented in and things for us to use. We said what sort of sound we wanted; guitar-sounding a bit like *Master of Puppets*, but a bit clearer, more British-sounding if you will. He was like, "Yeah, fine, no worries". We got there and he was one of the most enthusiastic, motivating sort of people you could wish to work with; he really gets you fired up, it's a real surprise. The second demo we did, the producer there was quite good, he got some really good sounds but it's just completely different working with an album producer. He'd get in your face and go, "Go on son! Go on!", really fire you up. It really helped me for the vocals because I was a bit self-conscious; I was trying something different, singing a lot more than I was on the demos, he was really really good. I think he intimidated Simon, our bass player, for a little bit but once Simon got round that, he really got some nice basslines out of him. We were all putting 150% into it. He didn't sit back at all. He could have sat back and said, "Well you know, I've done this band and that band, and they do it this way, you do it that way. It literally took him about a day to figure out what motivated each of us and how he would work us out. By the end of the first day he was best mates with everyone and really enthusiastic."

Did he actually choose to produce your album?

"Yeah, he did. We didn't know anything about this; Earache went to him. We were trying to think who we wanted; I must admit we didn't particularly want to go to Academy, because there's a bit of the stigma to English bands going to Academy. We were trying to avoid that, 'cause we didn't think it would suit our sound for a start. We said to Earache we didn't want to go there, thinking of a couple of other places. He [Simon Efemy] happened to be in Nottingham, up by the offices with this Portuguese band called **Inhuman** and they [Earache] went up to him when he was there and said, "Look, this is the budget, are you prepared to work?", and he was like, "Well yeah". He listened to the demo and was intrigued enough to come and see us rehearse. He liked the music enough and it was also a bit of a challenge for him: "Can I do an album of

sufficient quality in a couple of weeks?" From what I can tell, he took quite a drastic pay cut doing us which we're quite chuffed [about] to be honest. It was a bit of both: he wanted to work with us after having heard the demo and also it was a personal challenge. I think he was really pleased with the results as well, which was good for us."

You said when I spoke with you earlier that you wanted something of the **Paradise Lost** *Icon* sound but with a hint of *Master of Puppets*?

"Just the cleanliness, the overall almost slick, heavy guitar sounds, layered, well-produced, but not over-produced. It's that real fine line that we think *Icon* is on between good production and being too slick. I think we've got halfway between the two, which is more or less ex-

actly what we were looking for. The **Metallica** one has got the vibrancy and bounce to it, and **Paradise Lost**; the guitar sound on *Icon* is one of the best guitar sounds on an album I think you can get."

What's your opinion on *One Second*, incidentally?

"I actually quite like it, I must admit. I think it's got some weak points, some of the songs in the middle dip down a bit, but the single *Say Just Words* I think is one of the best songs they've written, that's really good. I don't think they should have called it **Paradise Lost** though; I'm of the opinion that if bands do change that drastically like **Metallica**, you should change your name because it's not the same. I quite like it, there's some really good stuff on there. I think they did too many songs, just personal opinion, but I don't like albums with about thirteen or fourteen tracks, I get a bit bored. Simon's a bit like that, but I don't think Lee's too keen on it. Mark really likes it, the keyboard player, he's well into it. If I was to review it I'd give it 4/5 I think, too good to get less, not quite killer enough to get more."

Earache's Coming Home

On the early November evening I carried out the interview, a title for the debut had not been settled on:

"We'll leave it blank for now, 'cause we've got a few kicking around but we don't want to let anything out until we've decided. It's like with **Anathema** and the *Pentecost III* thing, they announced it as *Rise Pantbeon Dreams* for ages and released it as *Pentecost III*. We'd like to wait until we've fully 100% decided."

What about the cover art? As it happened the boys initially meant to use something a little different, something very British.

"Yeah," Stephen answers, "we've got the cover all sorted out. It's a really stunning piece; a really vibrant picture, a stained glass window from King Arthur's Hall in Tintagel. Simon, our bass player's brother, collects books on the Arthurian tradition and that sort of stuff. He saw this picture in one of the books, said "What do you think of this?". We said, "Wow, cool!", and so it's this bright picture of Sir Galahad, him there with all these people around him, all brightly coloured, turquoises and purples. It looks really good. The whole idea of what we do is to try and stand out a little bit more than the average, run-of-the-mill band. Even something like an album cover, someone who's never heard of us before flicking through in HMV and just sees this album cover, says, "Woah, what's that?" and picks it out and looks at it. That's the sort of thing we're trying to get, everything stands out a little bit more."

The cover art used in the end has a band picture superimposed on what looks like a collage of naked women. Not as chivalrous as the first idea perhaps. But is there anything more to it than that, is there some subtle connection with the band's music?

"Yes and no. We chose it because it looked good and there's a few allusions to glass and mirrors and reflections through the lyrics, so we were keen on using a stained glass window just generally, we thought that would look quite classy. Then we saw that one, and it was like, "Excellent, that's what it is!". There's no hidden agenda behind it, it's not a concept tie-in or anything." Earache have broadened out a lot in the last five years in the more dancefloor-friendly direction. It's been more a case of disco for headbangers, as opposed to headbangers against disco. Do you feel you're signing marks a return to true metal on their part?

"I don't know. In a way, 'cause they've never really had what I called a metal band, obviously they've had death metal bands and whatever. I think we're a bit more melodic than a lot of the bands they've had before. We were quite surprised when they came in for us because we never pictured ourselves as an Earache band, if you know what I mean. They're going into this dance territory, or more **Misery Loves Company** sort of stuff. I think when we went up to the meeting they were

just saying that they did in a way want to get away from just having dance bands, **Ultraviolence**, techno or whatever it is... gabba, they did want to go a bit more mainstream metal in terms of having a band like that. Then they said they were not talking to any other metal bands, they sort of had half an eye out and then we happened to come along and they were interested; we were the only band doing what they were interested in. They said, "Well, we like what we've heard, we think you're the best of what's going out there at the moment in England, we'd like to work with you", and we were more than happy with that. It did surprise me because to be honest we didn't send a demo to them; bands have their criteria of labels and we thought Earache wasn't right, we didn't think they'd go for us. Like Roadrunner, they're moving in different directions, we thought it'd be a waste of time sending a demo, and it was just quite bizarre how it all worked out; they heard of us through the grapevine, the name just cropped up in Earache's offices somewhere somehow, and they got in touch with us and said, "Send us a demo".

Do you know how much of a push Earache is giving the album?

"Not yet, no. They seem quite keen, they're already talking about tours and all sorts of things. They seem quite enthusiastic, I speak to them quite often and they don't blow us out or anything, they listen to what we have to say and sort things out for us. As far as I know, they haven't actually heard the album yet, 'cause they only picked up the tapes today I think. They won't hear it until tomorrow, I think they're waiting 'till they hear it. They said when we signed the contract that we're among the priority bands for next year, so anything that's happened this year is not particularly relevant to our career I guess, apart from signing the contract. I think next year's when we're going to see where it all starts, but they seem really enthusiastic, quite behind us and I hope that continues."

Is there a downside to being signed to a big label like Earache so early, when you're young?

"I don't know, they've given us complete artistic freedom, if you will, so they haven't tried to impose themselves on us, and we haven't allowed ourselves to be imposed on, if you get what I mean. We've always progressed in major steps; the second demo had no bearing on the first, the progression was enormous, and I think they were seeing us more as potential, and allow us to develop. I think we're going to surprise them, and hopefully quite a few people, with how much we have moved on and progressed. We've always had quite a mature attitude for bands our age, we've grown up in private playing local gigs and getting all the crap out of our systems before we did anything major key, we seem to have been quite lucky in that way. Maybe because it hasn't sunk in, but we haven't felt any pressure being on the same label that used to have **Carcass** and **Entombed** and **At the Gates** and whoever. We haven't felt any pressure at all." They've avoided all the normal unprofessionalism that rising bands have to deal with at the whims of smaller labels at least. But Stephen reveals that things could have been different:

"We had a few offers and Blackend came in for us", he says. "For a start it wasn't the right sort of label for what we were doing. It was funny, we went up to the meeting at Earache on Tuesday, and the next day, the Wednesday we went to Plastic Head/Blackend and the difference in professional attitude was just so surprising. It's not just a gulf, it's an enormous chasm. Not saying that Plastic Head are unprofessional, but a lot of the smaller labels seem to have a long way to develop. Then again, when Earache started out, they were probably worse than that, run from Dig's bedroom or something!"

October Betrothal

So Steve, can you describe the new material?

"It's quite hard, I guess it's still - if you're going to use the term - gothic metal in that we've got the atmospheric keyboards and things but I think the advantage we have, just 'cause of what we're into personally, is that we have a much heavier, bigger guitar sound. Guitars are a lot more important than a lot of the European bands that are doing this gothic metal thing. The gothic and the metal are on equal pairings, whereas in other bands they're trying all these funny keyboard ideas and female vocals and whatever. We've got much more of a metal background. The new stuff? Take everything on the *Her Cherished Mask* demo and magnify it ten times either direction basically. The vocals are much better; I was saying with Simon Efemy, he dragged a lot out of me, there's no growling on there. It's not singing, in such a term, I don't know, it's aggressive but less growly, there's melody in every line. The whole thing is really melodic but really heavy."

It has to be said that the vocals are probably the weakest link on *Dancing under Glass*. There's work to be done there, and I fear they will turn off a lot of people as they are on the debut. Anyway, the vocalist brought up that dreaded 'gothic metal' term. Is he happy with the tag which Earache have pinned on *Entwined*?

"Yeah, other members of the band more so than myself. I think the term fits us but it doesn't in the sense that it's been abused by a lot of bands out in Europe. If you take it in the true sense of the term, the keyboards are in a way classically-influenced, there is that gothic edge to it. I'm happy, it's the most apt term, the only thing I'm not happy about is, like I said, the amount of other bands that are using it that aren't what I call gothic metal."

Like *Crematory*?

"I haven't heard *Crematory* I must admit, but - I don't want to slag bands or labels off - something like the Century Media thing. You get bands that start off quite heavy and by the end of it they're semi-acoustic and with clean guitars. There is a definite Century Media

sound, it's not even Century Media bands, because bands on Century Media tend to do it quite well, but all the labels that want to be Century Media, I don't know, Holy Records or something, they tend to churn out a lot of bands that don't have the cutting edge, the real energy. That's what's missing from a lot of it. When we went into the studio, the one thing we wanted to have most prominent is the big vibe to it, a real up-tempo feel, an energetic edge that is really missing from a lot of bands."

Holy pick the best ones earlier than Century Media, chum!

"I listen to hardly any of that sort of stuff, only going by a couple of tracks I've heard, so yeah, I'm probably a bit wrong, sorry about that!"

Nothing to be sorry about. Have you left all the songs on the second demo and not used them on the new album?

"Apart from one. We've still got '...Winter Love' but we've adapted it, it's a completely different version, almost like a new song. We've still got the guitar lines for the verse, but not the guitar line around the verse, the guitar line for the chorus and the bass break's been halved, we thought it went on too long really. Basically, it's been dragged into line with the newer stuff we're doing. We thought, of the tracks on the *Her Cherished Mask* demo, it was the song that was most in line with what we were doing now, but still needed a overhaul, a couple of the riffs have been changed. It's got a different feel to it overall now, but we're much more happy to it. At the time of *...Cherished Mask*, we were really happy with it, it was our favourite song at the time, but as you grow up, move on and write new stuff the older stuff - if you're going to keep it - needs to be updated. Some of the other things, something like 'October Betrothed' is just too far behind what we're doing now, it really was the first thing written after the first demo. And 'Suffer Silently' was our oldest song, we've had that before we were *Entwined*, Lee and I have had that for about a couple of years before then, kicking around in my bedroom, if you know what I mean."

'October Betrothed' was a personal favourite from your last demo, and for many people too.

"It's not a bad song. It's just the more slower, atmospheric songs - we've got one on there called 'Under a Killing Moon' - are more atmospheric, slower, a bit more monastic in a way. Everything's moved on, the dynamics are better. The problem we thought we had with 'October Betrothed' was that it didn't go anywhere. We've not sat down and talked about it, but the new songs flow and go to a next level, we seem to have picked up a better dynamic feel. This song 'Under a Killing Moon'; it builds and it grows, then it gets to the end and there's this big crescendo, it seems a bit more where we're going I think."

I have not heard the debut demo; 13. Was this initial recording stuck in a completely different niche?

"Yeah," Stephen agrees, "the thing about the first demo was at the time we had this big thing in our minds about what we should sound like; 'We must have slow riffs and sore throat vocals'. It served a purpose in a way; it got us gigs at The Devil's Church, but it really was a completely different mindset. It was literally the first four songs we wrote, and we recorded it six weeks after forming the band; we didn't have enough time. We're not much older now, but we were eighteen or something, and we were still finding where we wanted to go. We were a bit scared to allow the more **Metallica**, **Maiden** sort of vibe - that we all listen to anyway - we were scared to let that in, we thought 'Ah, people will think it's too up-tempo', we got stuck in an almost **My Dying Bride** [mode]; 'We must sound like this, have an English sound, we must do this, that and the other'."

By the time the second one came out six months later we just thought; "Well no, we're just gonna write what we want to write, what comes out, comes out, there's no set direction, if a riff's metal and it's rocking then we leave it in". "I Suffer Silently" was overhauled from the 13 days; what was on *Her Cherished Mask* was rewritten anyway. It was a lot slower and it didn't have that ending bit on it really. The first one came out February '96, and the second one was recorded in August '96. I know it's not very long; most bands spend more than six months before they do their first demo, but once 13 came out and people seemed slightly interested, we could get gigs, it gave us a massive spur on and really raised ourselves up about ten levels in five months. We came up with songs which we preferred listening to, more mid- rather than slow-paced or even up-

tempo, much more what we're into as people."

The sound quality on the second demo was excellent, where did you get that produced?

"We had a mutual friend, I can't remember who it was, some guy in a band, he said, 'Do you want to go to this studio?', a place called Adelaide in Malden, but it's now moved somewhere else in Essex. He's not actually a metal producer, he just does demo bands of anyone who's around the local area who will pay the going rate. He's top-quality, it's almost an album studio if he put a bit of time, money and work into it; it's got a 16-track recording desk, whereas I guess the minimum for an album is 24-track, it needs a bit of upgrading and a little partition for a drum room. We went there, not knowing what to expect, because the first demo was recorded in five hours for fifty quid. We were like; 'Sounds a bit naff really', expecting something like that, we went for three days and spent about £350 on it. We each put £60 of our own money in; you're not concerned about making money, you just want to be a band with a demo out and get some gigs off it. We put loads of our own money in, and considering Mark and James weren't working it was a lot of cash for them, for anyone. We went down there and the guy was just great for getting the sound. I think it helps him not being into metal, not having his own preconceived ideas of what a metal band should sound like, which I guess can be a problem."

Were you pushing that demo at people, or was it mainly for fun?

"Well we've always said if something's worth doing, it's worth doing well. We were going to put it out and push it, but we were more of the opinion that we'd send it to companies and get letters back saying, 'Nice one, send us your third demo'. It was almost like a stepping stone for us to doing this big killer third demo, where we'd be able to go out and get a deal from it. It just seemed to take us by surprise how well it came out considering 13 was the only thing to go by, and everyone seemed to be really into it so we were really pleased with that. We had a couple of offers, from Blackend and Mascot out in Holland. Peaceville showed a bit of interest; they were being a bit cagey, hedging their bets, then Earache came in and it just took us all by surprise at how quickly it went. We've heard of bands going three or four years, four or five demos before they get signed, and us having an offer twelve months after forming the band, it all came a bit quickly. I think, without getting big-headed or anything, that's due to the quality of the music, there's potential; it's not the finished article by any means. There's more of a vibe than a lot of demos have. Because I don't write the music - I write the lyrics and add the vocal lines - I can be quite set back and look on it from an outside point of view, it's exactly what I like listening to. The album stuff that we've just done is the next step on, it's hard to get my head round, it's quite hard to believe that it's your doing, it's quite bizarre. I don't think it will all sink in until I go into somewhere like Our Price or HMV and it's sitting there, it's going to be like 'Woah, what's going on!', it's a big buzz."

The high level of musicianship on your second demo gives me reason to wonder whether you or any of your bandmates had other projects before *Entwined*? I seem to have launched myself inadvertently in the middle of a long history lesson:

"Yeah, apart from Lee, we've all been kicking around in various sorts of bands. Me, James and Si have played together quite a lot; we were in a dodgy thrash band like everyone was when they're fifteen. We played **Slayer** and **Metallica** covers, and we got a few gigs out of that, and we literally got bitten by the bug. I'd known Lee for a little while, at school I got Lee into metal, [taught him] all about **Maiden**, and we'd draw **Metallica** logos on our rough books and things like that. Me and Lee had played together in my room a few times, doing a **Manowar** cover band called **Metal Storm** for a laugh. Then this strange thrash band fell apart and I said to Lee, 'Do you fancy doing something serious?', and he said 'Fair enough' and James and Si; we'd done well in the band, and we thought we'd get James and Si in again. I've been best mates with Si since I was about eleven, when we first went to secondary school, I've known him for ages. James is, to me, one of the best drummers for what he's doing. We kicked around in a band called **Mortal Tide** for about a year, that's where we wrote 'I Suffer Silently' in its original form, and we had sort of grasped the idea, we were using keyboards back then, I was playing keyboards, singing and playing guitar - a bit of a Morris dance - it was good fun and it just happened from there. We split up for a bit, thinking, 'This is going nowhere', we were pretty poor, the music wasn't great. We had about three months



off. Lee went off to the University of Cambridge, thought I'd add that! No, he went up to Anglia Poly and he formed a band up there. He just got a bit sick of it at Cambridge, didn't like the town, city or whatever it is. Lee's nan lives there and he was stuck with her, even then it was too bad, he couldn't deal with it, he didn't like it basically. He moved back and we had a bit of a chat just before Christmas on the phone, he was like; "How about getting the band going again?". I was like, "Alright fair enough, it's got to be completely new songs, completely new band", so he was like "Cool, fair enough". I think in those few months away Lee had developed as a songwriter. He's always been able to play the guitar, he's a really really talented guitarist, spends hours every day practising and really getting into it; he's a really strong musician. When he came back and we reformed the band, I was doing keys again, being honest I'm a pretty awful keyboardist, and we didn't want to get lumped in with all these bands where they just have some guy playing the keyboards for the sake of it. We thought we'd look for a proper keyboard player. Mark had been in this band called **Saturnalia**, they were being spoken to by Beggars Banquet but nothing ever came of it, he split that up. Then we didn't actually know Mark, a mutual friend said, "Ah, you're looking for a keyboard player, here's this guy", so we got Mark in from there. It was really good because he could actually play the keyboards rather than having someone just making a fool of themselves."

Classy dancing

That brings us up to the *Dancing Under Glass* material. Has the synth on the new stuff been toned up or down?
 "A bit of both, it really is - to use an awful phrase - horses for courses, like the song "Under the Killing Moon", or the track which will probably be the first track on there, "Sound of Her Wings". The keyboards play a really prominent part in it. On other ones like "Moment's Sadness", it's really all guitar-driven, a real uptempo beat, so the keyboards are still there all the way through but they're a bit more atmospheric and a bit less 'lead-liney', a bit less tinkly, a bit more overpowering, with a big swirling atmosphere sort of sound. Obviously there are a few lead lines on there, it's all what suits the song best. Working with Simon, and Russ the engineer, they both had a good idea what keyboards are about, and they'd say to Mark, "We'll just change this a little bit, it'll sound better, what do you think to this line?" and Mark would play it back and go, "Yeah, that's quite cool." It's all just fits the music a lot better now really, it's less like the band going underneath and the keyboards on the top, it's all integral now, every part's all linked in and works with each other rather than against each other."

In retrospect then do you think there was a lot of unnecessary synth on *Her Cherished Mask*?

"No, I don't think so, I haven't actually listened to it for a while. Stuff like maybe "Elegance in Death" is a little bit too keyboard-based for where we're going to, but in general there's no bits I listen to and go, "Oh, that's a bit embarrassing - ark, what are you playing there?", I'm still really proud of the demo, it's not that I'm embarrassed by it, it's just we've moved on."

You mentioned it earlier on in an unfavourable light, but have you ever had any desire to experiment with female vocals?

"No, not really. The songs we've got at the moment, there's no space for them, there's no real need, it would be a case of putting them there for the sake of it. I think the only way they work well is when they do something slightly different. That *Mandylin* album by **The Gathering**, the singing on that is really good 'cause it's different to your cheesy female vocals, though obviously they're lead vocals so it is a bit different. I think too many bands decide to stick female vocals on. I'm not saying we wouldn't use them but it would be done in a different way, a bit more of an atmospheric backing way rather than some female vocals chucked on for the hell of it."

On the cleanly-sung bits of *Her Cherished Mask* I sense a comparison with Vincent Cavanagh from **Anathema**. Is this fair?

"I can see where that's coming from, I must admit. It was people like Vinnie from **Anathema** and even Daz before him that made me confident I could get away with doing clean vocals. It was like, "You can't do clean vocals, it's heavy music", but then hearing something like *Pentecost III* or *The Silent Enigma* you think maybe I could get away with it. I think the real thing that got me into the clean vocals was *Into the Pandemonium* by **Frost**, I've never really heard **Frost** before and it was something different, it took me by surprise that you could do that sort of thing and from then on I've always experimented. The clean vocals really came to the fore when I thought heavy vocals sounded awful over that, really crap. Now, the actual style of singing is completely different; it's actually properly sung, there's some stuff on that on there which almost sounds like choirboy stuff, and not the band by the way! It's a lot to do with Simon Efemy, 'cause he was saying, "That sounds quite weak: a bit "I can't sing!"". It's a bit more like Burt Bell from **Fear Factory**'s clean vocals now, that clean singing rather than warbling, wavering your voice over."

What about **Ulver's Bergall...**? Stephen's answers lead to a bit of crossfire within these very pages.

"Yeah, it's a bit like that. The thing I was a bit annoyed about was that I didn't get to hear about *Bergall...* until after I'd heard *Madrigal of the Night*, and I wish I'd heard it when it first came out. I've never ever understood why a band wants a bad production, maybe it's not the underground thing to say, but I just couldn't put anything out knowing it had a bad production on it. Obviously it's all down to money from now onwards, but I'd do a **Machine Head** and turn around and say, "I'm sorry, I'm not happy with that, I'm going to re-record it". I couldn't see how any band would want to put out something where the sound is that bad."

What about this underground image though, is it an over-indulgent tendency to sound as unrefined as possible?

"I've never understood, this almost trying to out-cool other bands, "We've got the worst sound". I'm probably going against what a lot of people think but I've never really understood this underground ethic of not trying to be as good as you can be. If you can be this

good, 10/10, why be 6/10 or 5/10, it's a bit of a pet hate; bands trying to put themselves down for the sake of looking a bit cooler. I think in the long run they get found out; the bands that put the effort in and have the best music might not sell as well now, but two or three albums down the line they'll still be going strong. Obviously someone like **Darkthrone** are always going to churn out albums and do well because **Darkthrone** are **Darkthrone**; they have their own sound, their own appeal. I still think other bands that put a bit more of a professional attitude towards it are going to be the ones that rise to the top." Still, *The Madrigal of the Night* is not lost on Stephen: "It's strangely catchy", he opines. "I must admit the first time I put it on I thought, 'What the hell is that!' and halfway through the first song it's a bit ambient in a really bizarre way. Each to their own I guess, but we'll avoid that approach."

Walkyrie is God

One question I have put to other bands (call it recycling if you will) has been whether vocalists are content to express themselves through other people's lyrics. This vocalist won't be able to get away from offering an answer.

"The only time I've ever done it was on "I Suffer Silently", Steve says, "which is mainly because Lee wrote the lyrics before we formed any sort of band, he had this song kicking around for ages. Even then I never used to like singing it, it wasn't my song, I felt a bit like an outsider. I hadn't written the music, hadn't written the lyrics, it was almost like being in a covers band. The cool thing is that Lee had the song - had the lyrics just for that one - but from the start everyone assumed that I was going to do it, and I'm happy with that because I'm quite critical of other peoples' lyrics in bands. It feels more comfortable getting your own slant. The thing I do like about how we work that is probably different to a lot of other bands is that Lee or Mark or whoever will come up with the music, Lee will give it a title that fits the music, and I write from the title and the music. I don't come up with the titles, I work from them. It's really good 'cause it gives me a challenge; giving my opinion on what the title means and fitting in with the mood of the music. It means I write stuff that I wouldn't necessarily write, it stops me getting in a rut and churning out the same lyric over and over again, which I have been guilty of doing (none that ever made it to the recording stage). There was a phase I went through where all of the lyrics were more or less the same, and I was writing lyrics ahead of getting songs. I had lyrics lying around and was then trying to adapt them, but then now it just doesn't work that way, you can't get the same sort of feel." A lot of bands do things the other way round though.

"Yeah I know. It's just that I think when it comes down to lyrics and singing it really is personal, how everyone works. I've heard of bands where the singer writes fifty sets of lyrics and fits whichever one fits best. Personally, I prefer to get the title of each one, and the piece of music, sit down at two in the morning with my Walkman, play the song over and over again, really get into the feel of it, scribble down some lyrics, go back to them the next day, a week later or whatever and start amending them, change the feel of it slightly. I do write lyrics quite quickly I must admit; if I get stuck, I just bin the whole lot, it means they're not flowing. I have to write it all in one sitting. The longest I've spent is about twenty minutes writing them, but they're not throwaway, if I think they're throwaway I'll bin them. Obviously I'll amend them all the time, and singing in rehearsal if a line fits better than what I've got, I'll sing it and it all builds from there."

Romanticism was a major theme on the second demo, is it there again on the new album?

"Perhaps not as much as on *Her Cherished Mask*, the lyrics are a lot more straightforward. Virtually all the lyrics are about love and various aspects of it; experiences and relationships and things like that, but it's now done in a bit more straightforward way, a bit less long-words-for-long-words-sake."

Less poetic maybe?

"Yeah, in a way, but I still like using the odd metaphors, natural things as symbols, I just don't do it as much as before. I had a bit of overkill with it; "This is a great one, chuck this in, chuck this in!". I rewrote three sets of lyrics in the studio because we were in a really really nice setting, it was good to get away in all these fields on the outskirts. Simon was saying the problem with my lyrics was the timing, he was getting me into the feel of the riff and how it flowed, getting the lyrics to flow with the riff. The lyrics I'm most happy with are "A Moment's Sadness"; rewritten to flow with a punchy riff, and "Said Night Were Beauty"; completely rewritten in the studio lyricwise, completely changed the timing and it just flows so nicely now."

Are there particular lyricists who have inspired or impressed you?

"That's a hard one. I don't know, I normally don't pay much attention to lyricists, obviously I sing along and don't take in what I'm singing. I tend to spot what I think are bad lines before I spot good ones. You can get the same vocalist singing a couple of lines, one sounds great one sounds awful, in a way

I'd say no. I write lyrics as to what I'd like bands to write lyrics. I quite like someone like **Hetfield**, who uses quite straightforward lyrics (not on *Load* though, a bit weird for me on that one) but something like the 'black' album where everything's quite straightforward, defined and you can tell what's going on, they're not dumb lyrics but they are quite straightforward. I'm impressed by someone like **Martin Walkyrie** from **Skyclad** who comes up with clever lyrics. I do like his lyrics, but I think the problem he's got now is he's stuck in a rut where he has to write clever lyrics, whereas if you just chuck in a couple of little lines here and there that are clever, I think it's much better, like someone like **Hetfield** does."

Still, someone really should give **Martin Walkyrie** a medal.

What does Stephen think of the last **Skyclad** record?

"I quite like it but I wish it wasn't called **Skyclad**."

It's like that again is it?

"With someone like **Skyclad**, they were better when they were doing what they wanted to do. I think they've read too much of their own press; "We've got to go a bit more folksy, bit more folksy". My favourite ones are *A Burnt Offering...*, *Jonah's Ark*, and *Prince of the Poverty Line*, I think that was when they were really at their peak. Lee and I are both quite into **Sabbat**, don't like the other guy's voice when **Martin Walkyrie** leaves, I must admit; the *Mourning Has Broken* album I wasn't too keen on. *History of a Time to Come* is a really underrated album, really cool riffs. I reckon they influenced a lot more bands than bands let on, they can appeal to a lot of people, **Sabbat**." Even Pete from **Abigor**.

Love and Death

Turning back to the lyrical themes then. To the distaste of many in the scene, a lot more bands are exploring romanticism, but why?

"You can only go so far. I dislike political bands, just when they go on about it non-stop in lyrics, I think that has been done to death, got a bit boring. To me, music is like an entertaining thing, an escapist thing, you don't want someone going on about politics. I'm not particularly interested in politics myself, just in life. I think everyone's just got bored with the gore lyrics and the death metal thing, there's only so far you can go singing about Satan, that's if you're into that sort of stuff to begin with. I don't think it's a case that it's a last resort sort of lyric, I think a lot of people's music is more that way inclined, and it's the sort of lyric that fits best over that sort of music. Like ourselves in a way; a lot of the lyrics are about romanticism and love and things like that, there are a couple which aren't and it's just a case of the title of the song (for me) and the feel of the music not being that way inclined. Maybe I write differently to other people but I think it's more to do with the feel of the music being a bit more that way these days than it ever used to be. You couldn't talk about love because it was sappy, you couldn't sing about

love in a trash band. I think it is more the way the music itself has evolved rather than people being bored of it. If bands are writing ultra-heavy riffs then you're not going to get them singing about love on top of it."

Will there be lyrics printed on the CD?

"Yeah, there

will be, the reason we haven't had them before was just that it cost too much, to be completely honest."

Do you worry about giving yourself away through lyrics, turning your private side public?

"I've never seen it in that way. The reason I like lyrics printed is so people can know what's going on. I'm proud of the lyrics! To me, it's escapist anyway, even some of the love lyrics aren't necessarily based on personal experience, it's just putting myself in a situation or imagining things, almost fantasies in a way, like "October Betrothed"; eternal love beyond the grave, finding that one true soulmate. It's like myself personally; there's myself and there's me in the band, two people. Almost like two people, that's me away from the band, but in the band I'm like [adopts ultra-cool tone] "Steve from **Entwined**", and I just put that hat on when I'm writing the lyrics. I become that person and it's not necessarily me but there's obviously parts of me in there, so it's sort of like a culmination of the two that made the lyrics and vocal lines. It's not something that I'm particularly conscious about, there's no lies, 'cause there's nothing for me to feel embarrassed about." Stephen is not one of those artists who have to be in the doldrums to come up with the best lines.

"No, not at all really", he says. I write lyrics better when I'm more in a happy mood, I'm generally not a depressed kind of person, I don't get depressed too easily about



anything. It's quite hard for me to get to that sort of state anyway. I don't have to be in a certain sort of mood, I do have to feel a bit 'at peace', I can't sit in the living room with the TV on and write a load of lyrics, on the bus or whatever. I usually write most of them when I'm on my own, either in bed at night, listening to my Walkman over and over again with the track on it, or just when I was out in the studio. It sounds really corny and clichéd but going out, with all these lakes and trees and fields, on my own for half a day sitting down and writing some stuff. I've never written lyrics while depressed, but the only times I have tried anything like that was when I was upset about certain things, relationships or whatever. I read them a couple of days later and go, "Oh my God, what a pile of corny rubbish!", I can't do it to be honest. It's also the music of the band we are, there's always got to be an upbeat element to it somewhere. I don't like depressing bands really, obviously there's a time and a place for everything, but depression gets boring, it's not the sort of person I am really. Each to their own, I read an interview with Ginger from **The Wildhearts** where he said he couldn't write a song unless he was stoned out of his head, never tried that one I must admit (well the writing songs part!). Is communication of emotional ambience to the listener a factor in success?

"Well I think to get the song you have to get the feel of it, but not necessarily become obsessed or completely overwhelmed by it. To be honest, it really doesn't bother me whether someone's into the band 'cause they like the lyrics or 'cause they like the music. I'd prefer them to think the lyrics are awful and really get the music, the melodies and the sounds we make, rather than sit there and go, "Oh, I like that line!". I think it's just much more of a musical thing, but I do like having the depth of the things there that people can draw back onto the lyrics. Each song is quite clearly a definite mood, all different flavours and colours. I think you can get into the different feels of the songs. I don't like bands where all the songs sound the same, all the same emotional patterns, there has to be a bit of difference for me. I think within that you can get into each and every one on its own."

I know of someone who says that one of your tracks moves him close to tears!

"That's shocked me," he laughs nervously, "I'm sitting here with a shiver up my spine. No one's ever said that sort of thing before. Then again, I've never really spoken to people that have just heard it as outsiders, like yourself, people that I don't know. It's really good that people can get into it and relate to it."

Some bands aim for a reaction, and they don't care whether it's good or bad.

"Yeah, I can see where some people are coming from, I don't know where I stand on that. It is really good to get a really positive one, like just now what you said, made me feel well cool, really good, really nice. It's nice to get a reaction but to be honest, I think if people get into it in some form or another, people get into different things, different ways."

I mention the song "Elegance in Death". Can there ever be elegance in death?

"Yeah, I wouldn't have written the lyric if I didn't agree with the title. That is one of the more removed, fantastical, imaginary songs, I'm partial to believe it just because I think I'm a romantic at heart, that you can have love beyond the grave. I read somewhere that it's supposed to be one of the most peaceful things; having someone die in your arms with a really serene peaceful face, and a real warm feeling. I was just trying to picture myself in that setting. I think personally the lyrics are a bit too complex for the song, going back I would have rewritten them, but the whole feel of the song is what I like. It's not particularly something I'd like to experience to be honest, but it's something that caught my imagination."

Ooh crkey, everything's starting to smell of flowers! But Steve, don't people like you over-romanticise death?

"I think I'm a bit guilty of over-romanticising it myself in some of my lyrics. I don't like to get too hung up on it as subject matter."

We are but Slaves to the One with Warts

Entwined is a different beast onstage, as Stephen explains: "We haven't done too many gigs. Live is a completely different thing, there's almost like two different bands; there's in the studio where we have all the atmosphere, all the feelings, and live it's just about going out, having a great time, getting as many people down the front, headbanging, moshing as possible. It really is almost the complete opposite to all the nice little effects in the studio, all the little overlays

and harmony vocals, keyboard lines and stuff. Live it's about cranking it up and playing the songs a bit faster, really getting into them and choosing the most uptempo set, so people have a good time. I like having the two sides to the band though, it works well for me anyway."

Some bands want everything live as in the studio, and limit themselves in this way.

"I think it's just a case of bands like that taking themselves too seriously. We take the music seriously, we always have a joke, a mess around live and stuff. You can have the really solemn passages on the album, but live I think any band that stands there and tries to be sombre onstage is taking themselves too seriously and losing out. It's a different feel you get from each of them; in the studio, we did this instrumental called "13" (the title of the first demo, there's a circular link there!), but it's a really powerful piece, it's got a sample from *Schindler's List* in it, and a really epic slide solo, it's really nice. We'd never do something like that live; if you play that sort of thing live I think it's boring. Bands that take themselves too seriously end up shooting themselves in the foot."

You're playing at the Powerhaus with **The Blood Divine**, **Dearly Beheaded** and **Cathedral**, will this be the first gig after being in the studio?

"Yeah, it will be. It's going to be quite bizarre because I've got to completely learn how to sing doing the album stuff, 'cause I've never rehearsed. It was just literally a case of going in the studio and doing something completely new for me, and now I've got to learn how to play the guitar and sing like that, which is going to be quite interesting. We're really looking forward to it, we think now we're a much tighter, better band, we're much more comfortable with each other. It is true that living in each other's pockets for two weeks, you really do get to know each other quite well, and you can feed off each other. Our first gig was about 40 people in the middle of nowhere supporting an indie band. We've never really been bothered about who we play with, we haven't played with anyone with a real pedigree yet. We've played with **Dominion**, **The Blood Divine** and **Iron Monkey** but to me they're not really huge names. We just love playing live, we'll play with anyone really. We've been unfortunate, we had several support slots we were supposed to be doing over the summer, but all backfired at the last minute with bands pulling out and promoters doing us over. We were supposed to be special guests with **Rotting Christ**

when **Hecate Enthroned** pulled out but then that fell through the day before. I've never heard **Rotting Christ** but it was offered and it was a band we'd heard of, so we said we'd do it. Then the day before we got phoned up saying, "Oh sorry, we've got a local band who can do it for free, so we're dropping you from the bill". Sometimes there's not a lot you can do about it; we were supposed to be playing with **Acrimony** in Chester, same thing happened; **Acrimony** pulled out a couple of days before and the promoter said, "Sorry boys, it's not happening now", there's nothing you can do, you've told everyone on your mailing list you're playing and it's too late to tell 'em you're not, you get loads of letters saying, "Why didn't you play this bloody gig?!" It's a real shame because I hate getting ready to see a band and find out they're not playing, they announce another date a few days later and cancel that and you think, "I can't be bothered going to see them". It's really against what we stand for, we'd like to play every gig that's announced. The young men from **Entwined** had recently come to see Lemmy and company at the **Motörhead** gig in Cambridge, what did Steve think?

"I thought they were better at the Astoria when I saw them in January but I thought it was a damn fine gig. They played exactly the same set, but I think **Motörhead** are a class band, you can't knock 'em, we cover one of their songs at the moment, "Go to Hell" off *Iron Fist*. It's a bit of a bizarre choice but we heard it and thought it would be a cool thing for us to do. We revamped it, put keys on it and changed the middle section completely. We didn't record it, hoping to get to do some B-sides later on, stick out a single or an EP about six months after, that all depends on the label."

I leave Stephen to sell you the *Dancing under Glass* album:

"Being completely honest, it's uptempo, aggressive, melodic, heavy, enjoyable, fun metal. If people like metal of any sort then they should love it, there's elements for all sorts of people in there just 'cause of what we listen to. It's really enjoyable, quite easy to get into; great melodic metal."

OK, that's it, you can all go home now! If you're very sensible you'll stop off and buy the new album on your way.

P.O. BOX 13, STANWAY, COLCH-
ESTER, ESSEX CO3 5WB, ENG-
LAND.



The Ophidian Wheel was one of the landmark death metal albums of 1997, a work of near genius merging powerful, melodic passages with elements of eccentricity and ethnicity. When I questioned core bandmember Sotiris Vayenas, he had just finished working on the creation of a video clip from the song "The Eldest Cosmonaut" off their fourth album *A Fallen Temple*.

"It gives us ultimate artistic control", the goatee-sporting musician says when I asked about the importance of having the cover art of their albums painted by fellow **Septic** member Spiros. "We decide what to show presenting the most important symbolism of the songs. Surely it is not the same to hire someone else to design what is on your mind; the authentic connection is lost. We are very lucky that Spiros is also a very talented painter."

Sotiris goes on to explain about the video clip, and why they chose the song they did:

"Video representation is something more complex as there are so many different external factors that influence the final result. From our side we gave a lot of weight to the choice of director, the equipment needed (we preferred film camera to video camera), the place of the shooting and the basic idea of the film. "The Eldest Cosmonaut" is the most advanced song of the album, presenting the classical elements of our sound but also a new face. In addition all three singers of the band appear on this song; Spiros, Natalie and I, producing a more theatrical result. Thankfully Holy Records financed this effort and we spared no money in order to create something professional and visually captivating."

Static Geometry

Some might question the inclusion of a different version of the aforesaid track on *A Fallen Temple*.

"As the album had already enough recorded time, it was not an issue of filling the empty space", Sotiris says. "The second version is different in the field of production (keyboard-orientated) and on the vocals (the appearance of Spiros' growls). Initially we tried to pick up one version but as we liked both we decided to have them both."

A key factor in the success of *The Ophidian Wheel* was the vocal performance by Natalie Rassoulis. I asked Sotiris whether Natalie had any role as a free agent as regards creating music in **Septic Flesh**, as complementary to her independent recording career on Virgin Records:

"No, she followed our instructions in accordance with the demands of the songs. It is true that she has her own career apart from the band. As far as there are no contractual problems and she has the free time probably she will help us again in the future. Otherwise, I don't think we'll use female vocals, we don't like to compromise."

Chris Antoniou is the man responsible for the more neo-classical compositions on the latest full-length. How does Spiros rate the importance of the man's time spent learning music here in England, wherever it was?

"Chris initially passed in Sussex, then he moved to London", Sotiris reveals. "Comparing his first effort, the



song "Mythos", from our debut album back in '94 with his latest work, it is obvious he has learnt a lot about neo-classical composition. Now we use almost every available console channel to present his arrangements. From his impression of England, he had no problem rearranging his life."

Are there any other English connections we should know about?
"As for our musical ties aside from **Maiden**, we grew up listening to **Judas Priest**, **Saxon**, **Venom** and of course **Black Sabbath**."

Of course.
Sotiris begs to differ with me when I suggest that there is something of an **Elend** feel to the "Underworld" tracks on the new disc:

"I don't share your opinion. **Elend** are basically lovers of Vivaldi. Their sound is based on a certain tempo with the sound of the violin as a protagonist. Chris, on the contrary, is influenced from the latest classical school and composers like Stravinsky for example. He utilises a large variety of sounds and percussion with unexpected tempo changes and use of dynamics. A common element between the two is the use of operatic soprano leads and the absence of the classic metal rhythm section. In my opinion **Elend** are more dramatic and Chris is more aggressive and epic."

Turning to the other songwriters then, how could one differentiate a Spiros composition from a Sotiris creation, in the context of **Septic Flesh**?

"Spiros creates a more optimistic mood, and his approach is more straight. On the other hand, my compositions are based on more bizarre melodies and arrangements. However, all members give their personal element with their opinion and performance. So, it is not a matter of only one person, but a matter of chemistry between all the characters involved."

A Fallen Temple, as far as I'm concerned, falls short of its predecessor not least because the album has those revamped early tracks in the middle. If, as the band have stated previously, *Esoptron* was a slow-acting emotional poison and *The Ophidian Wheel* was a shot in the head, then the latest would be, what? It's certainly more indirect in many ways.

"Yes," Sotiris picks up, "and that was something unavoidable as this album is composed from songs made during different epochs. We could try to bridge the differences between the songs, avoiding parts that are going far away from the middle but I'm that way we would miss the essence. We love to evolve creating more melodic and experimental but we are also proud about our brutal past, we like to play at mid-tempo but we are not afraid to use extreme speeds if we feel like it. *A Fallen Temple* is a multidimensional structure with many gates that can lead the listener to enchanting places."

I wondered why other bands besides **Septic Flesh** hadn't chosen Praxis as their studio, instead of the other, more customary places.

"Maybe because it's more expensive than other Hellenic studios", Sotiris muses. "We prefer Praxis because it has the best studios, the proper equipment, experienced personnel and also we feel very comfortable. It is very important to easily reach the right mood and psychology before a recording."

Our man also had a gothic/darkwave project on the backburner, **Danse Macabre**, last heard of shortly after being ripped off by Molon Lave Records. Any news on that band?

"The owner of Molon Lave Records left from Hellas leaving no trace behind him. As we learned, he owed money to some people. His "disappearance" happened just at the time we had finished the recordings of two songs for a single. After that cold shower, Gunther went on to tour with **Ancient Rites**, M.W.Daoloth created a variety of other projects and I was focused on my main band. Years passed and no opportunities appeared to unite and bring this darkwave/gothic entity on the surface. So, Gunther proceeded finding a member from **Lacrimosa** and keeping the old name. Recently they released a full-length album on Mascot Records with the original two songs - where Daoloth and I appear - as bonus tracks."

Chasing the Chimera

"The process of learning depends on the evaluation of past actions and results. Then experience is gathered and it can be used for future decisions. Past, present and future is a unity. Those that do not realise this simple fact are worthy of the consequences."

Sotiris is clearly fond of delving into the past in order to find inspiration and to gain wisdom. The cover art falls into the usual **Septic Flesh** paradigm of mixing old and new imagery with hidden symbolism.

"Spiros wanted to try a different way of expression with the use of computer-animated graphics", the musician elucidates. "His base was a photo taken from a photographer friend, the theme is flesh as the temple of the soul. The carved hieroglyphics represent knowledge. Order is embodied within these scars of experience establishing a conscious connection with life illuminating the mind-body bridge; what we call spirit."

What about those animals on the cover of the previous album?

"The reptile servants on *The Ophidian Wheel* cover, amongst other things, symbolise the left and right side of the brain with different qualities but equal importance. We wanted to exalt the state that the two sides are under advanced control stimulating also the most ancient part of the brain; the reptile brain."

The song, "The Future Belongs to the Brave", predictably, puts forward the idea that everything is available to those who dare. Shouldn't one be careful not to set your personal standards too high, since you are likely to be disappointed?

"Surely there are limitations and it is impossible to withdraw all limitations at once. That would mean elimination of identity as the limits solidify identity. What can be done is the alteration of our

potentials and therefore our limitations, removing "a chain, for a chain". This continuous transformation is the product of life itself and it comes in stages. It is wise to wait for the circumstances and the available means, choosing carefully the goals to be beaten. To give an example, one first has to learn the basic mathematical principles before trying to solve a complicated mathematical problem. There will always be higher and lower, it is more positive to try for the something more than remaining stagnant. Depression is to stop the effort, to expect the same and the same again. I prefer to be restless than be lazy. Knowledge, patience and effort are the keys to improvement."

The excellent "Chasing the Chimera", taken from the full-length debut, had a lyric that was slightly less optimistic, being concerned more with the trials of life than the possibilities on offer. Sotiris explains that the chasing of the chimera isn't all fun and games:

"I have my ups and downs as everybody else. Things are not always pleasant and that's the point of the song. The wine of victory is sweet but the taste doesn't rest long in our mouths. We have to drink it again and again. Life is war, the battles countless. We win some, lose others gaining scars. The bravery is to learn from your scars, to accept reality, abandoning comforting utopias, concentrating on the wild charm of the endless chase."

Rites of Eleusis

In other interviews, Sotiris has hinted at "hidden histories" beneath the surface of conventional interpretations of ancient culture and civilisation, could he reveal more?

"To give you a glimpse, some mysteries are not examined at the extent that they should be, for example the mysteries of Eleusis. There were also curious beliefs, valued from many great men, like Sacred Geometry, where geometrical symbols were used for meditative reasons."

The East/West connection surfaces here as regards the similarity with the Indian tattvas and yantras; again, shapes used for meditation.

"Underestimated are the exchange of ideas and knowledge between exalted Hellenic minds, like Thalys Mülisios for example, and the high priesthood of the Pharaohs. Events and important historical issues are overshadowed from other events not so "mind-confusing" and alarming to the common eye. What doesn't fit in the picture can always be ignored or misinterpreted."

Of course, Sotiris recognises the importance of myth and religion as a causal artefact of social history:

"Myths reflect the cultural and psychological profile of the people that were their "target". The leaders (kings, priests, wizards and warlords) used myths to direct the actions of their subjects in accordance with their will and desires. On a deeper level the ancient possessors of power in the form of knowledge realised their responsibility to pass it on but without letting the flow of information get out of control. With a careful study we can learn a lot from the myths. Especially the comparison of myths spread at different locations during different periods but with common elements can provide a wide range of conclusions. The Nordic and Hellenic lore represent different philosophies and beliefs; the first simpler, the second more sophisticated but both have their value. I don't know why not so many bands were inspired by the Hellenic myths. The sure thing is that if someone has based his impression on Hollywood films and "entertaining" TV series has a completely distorted view."

Septic Flesh have always been fond of scratching beneath the surface, and have lyrics. Sotiris once seemed sceptical as to whether the ordinary fans ever cared about the depth involved:

"I admit I wasn't expecting so much interest concerning my lyrics. I was surprised by the number of letters sent from people that actually read the lyrics. They wanted to know more about the symbolism and the meaning behind them. Of course, there'll always be listeners that care more about the music and that's OK with me. I never intended to enforce my thoughts and beliefs. On the other hand I have no problem sharing them with like-minded personalities."

The man is well aware that music often works at the level of the lowest common denominator.

"The big record companies, radio stations, magazines, promoters, producers and managers" he states, "have the biggest share of responsibility about what becomes established or not. They do not encourage intellectual mainly because an intellectual audience is a difficult audience. I have no problem with simplicity as far as it has emotional power. When music is charged with authentic emotions, it "speaks" directly to the soul of the listener. This is what we are trying to do and people appreciate it."

Whips and Roses

"If someone expects to hear music from us that he could put on



during a dinner with his girlfriend on a table lit from the soft flame of white candles, he's going to have a big surprise... Except if his girlfriend is a succubus!"

Sotiris appears to be well aware that people may misunderstand the form of the "romanticism" which their record company often paints them with.

"We are romantic towards the past. We are not against technology and evolution, however we feel a strong attraction and connection to more ancient aesthetics. We surely do admire female beauty and are enchanted by the ways of the flesh but I couldn't say we are so romantic. Basically we are hedonists that find nothing sacred about suppressing our animal nature. If pleasure comes by giving a rose, it is OK, if it comes by using a whip, it is OK too."

In the song "Narcissism", it states that "Love, it's purest form is narcissism". Must one love oneself before one can give it out to others?

"You love others because they are important for YOU. Even when people are not responding to your feelings making you hurt and you continue to love them it is YOUR choice based on YOUR beliefs, YOUR psychological needs, YOUR aim for satisfaction."

Bizarre Cosmic Industries

I was bemused to read that when **Septic Flesh** sent a promo to Roadrunner Records before being signed, the company responded with a detailed rating of the band in terms of originality, music and image. Does Sotiris think that bands are overly influenced by how they are perceived to be? How strong is the urge to sell yourselves out?

"When music is an industry, the band an investment, an album a product, then all the above mentioned actions are understandable. Some will compromise, others won't. It is a matter of character: if someone can or can not sell his dignity and soul for success."

Our Mr Vayenas is clearly satisfied with the current situation.

"My last information (received at the beginning of June) was about 16,000 copies", he says when I ask him about the sales of the latest album. "It seems that *A Fallen Temple* will surpass the sales of its predecessor. As for Holy Records, they respect and fully support us. We appreciate that and we'll stay on their team for at least one more album."

Septic Flesh were planning to play at the Rock Wave Festival in their native Greece. What became of that, and are there any other plans for the bandmembers?

"Unfortunately the Metal Day was cancelled because the headliners couldn't make it," Sotiris reveals, "we were pissed off. On October Chris will focus on his personal album that will be soundtrack-like, based on a story created by me. Right now, I am writing the plot."

Let's continue the occasional theme here of asking interviewed bands to comment on each other. What's your opinion on the soundtrack-like music of **Bal-Sagoth**, Sotiris?

"**Bal-Sagoth** are very influenced by Basil Poledouris. I like them a lot for their epic and symphonic approach. They know how to create an intense atmosphere playing both brutally and technically."

We conclude by asking our man whether he is satisfied with the success he has achieved under the banner of **Septic Flesh**:

"If you compare our success with the success of other bands we are neither a small nor a big name. We are always aiming for better. We'll be happy if we'll continue climbing the stairs. On the other hand if things don't turn in our favour, we'll still feel proud. When I listen to our records my spirit trembles with joy. No matter what, music is what remains at the end."

SEPTIC FLESH, P.O. BOX 5058, PATRA 26004, GREECE.



Aw shucks, another one bites the dust. Just when I was thinking the English scene was looking up, **The Blood Divine** go and kick the bucket following the departure of keyboardist Ben Ryan. Some months before the break-up, I got in touch with his brother Paul Ryan, and talked to him about the second album that was just about to be released; *Mystica*. It turned out to be a behemoth of an interview, so hopefully something will be gained from the inclusion of a 'posthumous' feature.

On the evening in question, a powercut in my house forced me to conduct proceedings in almost total darkness. The first thing I asked was how the guitarist felt about the new recording.

"Personally speaking," Paul says, "I think this album's a step forward and it's more of our sound than the last one. While we still really like *Awaken*, it was very much an in-between step as it were. It was out six months after we'd actually left previous bands; we recorded it straight away and we only really had two or three months to get something together. It was pretty rushed really, obviously we spent as much time on it as we could. So we feel as though we've had a lot more time to focus on this album and I think it sounds a bit more like **The Blood Divine**."

The album certainly has a more accessible approach than the debut, although Paul is quick to step in on this point.

"I wouldn't say we've sold out," he says. "I wouldn't disagree with the fact that the album's more commercial but we didn't purposely write an album that's more commercial, it's just we as people crave to do something different every time. I can promise you one thing: you won't get one album out of us that'll sound the same - not radically different - but obviously we like to feel as though we're progressing. I get very restless when it comes to staying in the same boat and doing exactly the same thing for a while. That was one of the decisions that we'd acted on in the past; we didn't get stuck in the same rut and being labelled as something in particular. That's why we flit around and do what we want. If it comes out more commercial then fine; at the end of the day we're doing the band because we love doing the band, but we also want to make it our career as well. There's definitely more commercial elements in this album, but I think this album's heavier in some places, different really."

But presumably Peaceville/Music for Nations weren't putting much pressure on what they thought **The Blood Divine** should sound like. "No," Paul agrees, "they are very good like that, we can do everything we want basically. Obviously if we turned round and gave them a grindcore album, I don't think they'd be too happy, unless it was really really good. As long as it's good and they think they can sell it, they're happy. That's basically how any record company works; as long as they think there's a market for it, they seem to be happy for us doing it. They do give us a free rein, they do trust us."

You changed your logo, were you restless with that too?

"The Divine Eye symbol will be the only thing that will probably stay with the band; that's our symbol. We haven't so much changed our logo; yes, it's different on this album, but that suited the imagery on this album more than the last logo. I'm not saying that the logo we've got now will specifically stay the same either. As far as logos go, we're really trying to suit the mood as it were."

Awaken was meant to be taken subjectively at a conceptual level, is it the same with *Mystica*?

"No, it is specific to a certain extent. It doesn't really mean anything specifically, but it does have a rough thing to it once you see the artwork and our pictures. You can't really see pictures of ourselves on the album, we've got individual pictures but our instruments are blurred in the background. We've purposely built the album round the theme, almost to make it mystical. Darren's philosophies are quite mystical as well, it's how we are really. I'm not trying to say that we are all really mystical, spooky people. Darren's got his aura and he's into his things, and more than anything from the musical point of view, we're trying to get across that we are in the background to our music. I think too many bands get wrapped up in imagery. But obviously I'm not against seeing myself in pictures. We are the music, simple as that!"

Was the artwork drawn?

"No, no it's all pictures. Darren did all the pictures on this album, as he did on the last one, all the artwork and stuff. You can see by Darren's pictures that he's quite a photographer, we think he's really good. That's why we're using the artwork, we're happy Darren can do pictures like that; we really like them. This one was obviously more of a theme, whereas *Awaken* with the music, it's the same with the artwork. Again, we were finding our feet as I'm sure Darren was artwork-wise, he had more time to think about a specific idea. We also got a chance to use what we couldn't use on *Awaken*, 'cause there were a few pictures we were toying around with; the Egyptian theme is something we really did want on *Awaken* but we couldn't get the pictures to do it. Since then, Darren's been to Egypt and all the pictures on the album, bar the pictures of ourselves, are actually taken from Darren's vacation in Egypt, from the tombs. It was more of a planned feel for the artwork than on *Awaken*, most definitely."

Does it tie in with Egyptian mythology?

"We're definitely into a lot of the Egyptian mythology and stuff like that, the imagery and the meanings behind the Egyptians; I think they were very powerful, again mystical people. That's another reason why *Mystica* is the title, it's to do with Egypt. There are theories that aliens are related to Egyptians and perhaps they were one of the first races of aliens to come down and that sort of thing."

The Blood Divine



I put it to Paul that the head on the *Mystica* cover looks uncannily alien. There are actually a number of ancient artefacts bearing iconography that remind of *The X-Files*.

"Yeah, we're trying to hint at that", he says. I wouldn't rule that out at all, I can't see how you would get a race of people so advanced in such basic times, everything else that was going on in the world was very primitive, they had power to move big stones for miles, they had the power to build the Pyramids and the Sphinx. That's not the reason that it's there, but we're dead into that sort of thing."

Do you think metal bands should grow out of the tacky covers they're so fond of?

"A lot of them do, all skulls and death and Satan. All very good, I'm not dissing it; I've got tonnes of albums with that sort of thing on and I love bands that use that sort of thing. It's not my bag really."

Blood Mysticism

There's a noticeable technical edge to *Mystica* which wasn't there on *Awaken*. Paul puts this down to the band's increasing confidence and maturity:

"This is it, we've definitely grown, *Mystica*'s a lot stronger an album simply because we've had a whole year to grow together in the format as we are. When we did *Awaken*, we'd not worked with each other before as a band, and we get a lot more now, we know how each other works on a musical side. I think being in a band is the best form of learning, from the guitar-playing point of view my playing's improving all the time. Not because I sit down and practise ten hours a day, because being in the band and having a real in-the-deep-end experience is the best way you can learn. I think when the band grows you subconsciously learn all the time."

Are the band all self-taught?

"Yeah, to a certain extent. I mean we're all pretty much the same music-wise, we had music lessons to learn the basics on the guitar side. I had lessons to learn the chords - obviously I knew how to strum a few chords together with the music teacher - but as far as anything to do with metal or alternative music, that's completely self-taught. There's no teachers about who can teach you to play rock, or metal, or anything vaguely alternative. If you want to play classical, fine, if you want to play jazz, fine, but there's no actual teachers to teach you the sort of stuff we're doing. So we are 99% self-taught."

A lot of bands are very into stressing they had no lessons, like it was never cool to admit to it, or something?

"If I had found a teacher at the time who could teach me to do the sort of stuff I'm doing now, brilliant, I'd have definitely gone for it. Any vaguely alternative music, you just have to do it, you can't be taught it, it's something that you either do or you don't do. Much the same perhaps as jazz; you can either play and you can do it alright, or you can't play it at all and you're useless at it. For me, as far as learning, playing along to records was the thing, **Maiden** and stuff like that obviously gives you more of an insight on what you're doing. I think most bands definitely start off with musicians copying the

bands' riffs they like, perhaps an **Iron Maiden** type riff here, a **Morbid Angel** type riff there, and after a while you find 'Well maybe I can put my own touch on it?'"

Bigotry

Larlington Hall sounds more like a country house than a recording studio, but it's where *Mystica* was recorded.

"Well," the guitarist explains, "it's actually a new studio set out by Eric Cook, who manages **Venom** and **Abaddon** (Tony) the drummer out of **Venom**. They did have a studio called **Lynx**, which a lot of bands have gone to, **Skyclad** have done a few albums, **Venom** have done albums up there, **Anathema** have done an album up there. That was OK, it wasn't a bad studio, it's just this one they've opened up is a hundred times better, it's in a really nice location, the gear's really good. Through Eric and Tony knowing Music for Nations, I managed to sort a deal out and we were lucky enough to go in there. The best thing about it was that we actually recorded the album in between **Venom** recording their new album. So they recorded half of it, they had to fly off to do some shows, but all the gear was set up, they just put all the desks flat and basically let us use all their gear, their drum kit and their guitar cabs, everything. They were like, 'Yeah, use our

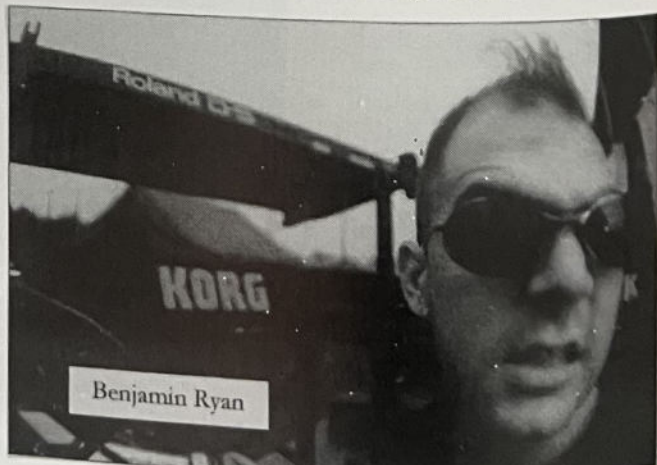
gear', and we were like, 'Fuckin' 'ell **Venom**, no worries, cheers mate!' I didn't meet any of them apart from Tony, but he was being very helpful to Was, who had the pick of all his cymbals, lying around everywhere, 'Use what you want!' We were very fortunate to be in that position, so besides it being recorded on **Venom**'s gear, it was recorded in the middle of their album as well, which for me was definitely something special, because I've always loved **Venom**. Pee Wee [Coleman] mixed the first album, and we really liked what he did, so we decided to go with him and it worked out real well."

Paul goes on to say that he was much more satisfied with the knob-twiddling this time around:

"I prefer it to the *Awaken* production, it's more the production I like, not so clean-cut, not so dirty. Don't get me wrong, I love the production we had on *Awaken*, we didn't go there because we thought the production on *Awaken* was shit, we liked Pee Wee's ideas. The guys at Academy were cool, really good blokes, but Pee Wee is more of a laugh to work with. Obviously, he's producing quite big albums, with **Paradise Lost** and **Amorphis**. It was something we were drawn to from that angle really."

There's more experimentation as regards the synth angle in the new record from your brother.

"Yeah, I think Ben's very conscious of the average band who get a keyboard player in these days. You've got your choir voices, your strings voices and maybe a pit of pipe organ or spooky piano and that's it. Everyone fucking uses them you know! Ben does like metal to a certain extent but Ben's main base is stuff like **Jean-Michel Jarre**, to **The Doors** and **The Orb**. Being a keyboard player he's very into keyboard music, and I think to be quite honest, he's got so sick of people using all the same sounds, he wanted to revert back to the sounds he does like, like the Fender Rhodes sound and the Hammond sound. We hired in a Hammond for the studio, and he's now bought a Hammond, so we are a proper Hammond band, it's just getting the fucking thing around really; they're really fucking heavy to lift. We played a gig in Uxbridge and it took ten people to get it on stage, so they're real hefty. The sound you get out of a Hammond you can't beat I don't think, anyone who digs **Deep Purple** is bound to like it. He wanted to experiment around on a few sounds



just 'cause he was sick of everyone using the same things."

Was's drumming is more in the spotlight too.

"Again, he was finding his feet when we wrote *Awaken*, and he's had time to fit more into it, experiment more. Was is very much into his jazz and Japanese white noise, stuff like **John Zorn** and stuff like that, *Naked City* and obscure stuff. All his influence has come out a lot more, he's a very rhythmical drummer, although he can play blastbeats and do all that sort of stuff, fundamentally I'd say he's a jazz drummer really. Was is one of the people who have really shined through on this album, he's a very natural type of drummer. I know he does enjoy doing blastbeats and fast drumming and that but his forte I think is more the side of what we're doing, or the jazzier side of stuff. He can just sit down and let it blow out, doesn't have to think about it, it just happens."

Does his playing in **Extreme Noise Terror** and **December Moon** help the jazziness come out in **The Blood Divine**?

"He's got a lot of experience; he's recorded a few albums and it gives you that scope. I think the sign of a good musician is someone who can turn their hand to anything, whether it be extreme music, whether it be soft music, classical, jazz, whatever. All the best musicians can play anything. Take someone like **John Zorn**, listen to *Naked City*, it's one thing to another, bit of country and western, bit of blues, bit of jazz, bit of blast, anything. All the best musicians can do that, because Was is from that sort of camp, I think that's why."

You're very shy on being pigeon-holed as a band.

"Most definitely, that's one reason why we're going to make a conscious effort; you won't get one album sounding completely the same as the other, because we don't like being tagged, I want to make a career of the music, and at the end of the day there's nothing worse than being tagged in one category. It doesn't matter if it's black metal, it doesn't matter if it's stoner rock, death metal, it doesn't matter what it is. As soon as you're put in a category, the journalist puts you in a category, your lifespan is in that category unless you're very good at changing your colours like a chameleon (which a lot of bands are). As soon as you get roped into one category, that's it. It's inevitable that we'll get grouped into a category but I'd like to think, ideal of all ideals, that we'd have our own category. I don't like anyone saying to us, "Oh, we like this, we like that", simply because it's one of the things that splits music up, one of the worst things. I'm as much guilty of it as anyone else, I'm not trying to make out that I'm perfect. As a musician there's nothing that upsets me more than certain categories of bands not being able to play with each other. Obviously you couldn't really have a jazz band with an extreme black metal band, because the audience just wouldn't mix, but why can't you have a metal band playing with a stoner rock band or a black metal band or whatever? You can't do that, because it just doesn't mix a lot of the time, but the only reason it doesn't mix is because people are bigoted, and they think, "Oh, that's *that*", music's music to me, if it's good I like it simple as that. We all think in that way, we have to call it by its name just because people take it, but I'd like to think all the types of different metal, thrash metal, speed metal, as just being metal, or alternative. Why can't bands be just, "Oh, they do alternative music, non mainstream music?"

The problem, of course, is that music - like it or not - is a business. If you wish to sell your music to the general public, it's inevitable.

"Yeah," Paul agrees, "but it's not like it in some scenes, look at the pop industry; **Oasis** are pop, **The Chemical Brothers** are still in the charts (some people might say they're a pop band), there are radical differences in other scenes. One of the things that's dead apparent in the metal scene is that the tags drag people down, because people seem to be a bit black and white in this scene."

Surely though, the reason for the pop industry being as it is comes down to the fact that there is less of a communication problem between record labels and consumers, due to the fact that the music is aggressively promoted via the media.

And anyway, if people are bigoted, is that not their problem?

"Oh it is, but there are an awful lot of 'em. I know there's an awful lot of people that don't think that, lots of people give everything a listen, but there are so many people who, if they read in a magazine that a band is not a black metal or a death metal band, they won't bother even listening to it unless their friend plays it to them; there are loads of people like, "Oh, well I won't bother, it's not death metal", which upsets me really. It is their problem, but when I'm in the thick of it trying to make a difference it's really annoying, and that's why - reverting back to the question - we are dead paranoid about being tagged. I see it as a noose around the neck, I really do."

Shadows from the Past

The instrumental, if it can be called that, "Visions of a Post-Apocalyptic World" on your debut sounded a bit removed from the fabric of the rest of it.

"Yeah," Paul concedes, "maybe so. That's the one fault I'll point out on *Awaken*. Don't get me wrong: I wouldn't have done it any different at the time, but we were finding our feet so there were a lot of different styles on it. That is on a theme of trying to create visions through sounds as it were. Perhaps in years to come, if the world is ruled by aliens, if that is the case, after there being a mass nuclear explosion or whatever and everyone's forced underground. They were the sort of sounds that we were trying to base on that; the underground sounds, someone being in the gutter listening up, a mixture of the sounds of the gutter and the sounds of the clunking about of the machinery and computers upstairs. The concept of part two is further into that story, it's a case of it going away a bit, perhaps coming about on top and things looking a bit calmer, but there's a definite concept behind it. You'll see more of that as time goes on, fingers crossed. There'll definitely be a part three, and a part four, five and a part however many until things don't go on anymore. I'm positive about the future so I'd like to think the story will unravel itself basically, without sounding all spooky or mystical with it!"

Paul was unaware that the sequel to that song, appearing on the second record, was almost exactly twice as long as the first. It seems a quirky coincidence.

Again, on the first album you had some great female vocals from a certain Ruth, have you abandoned this idea for now?

"Yes, for the time being. Again, too many people have done it really. It was an element of things we liked, personally speaking I really like it but it's the keyboards/female vocals scenario; it's brilliant when people do it but for ourselves, we don't want to do stuff done before, simple as that."

The song I referred to, "Warm Summer Rain", smelt nicely of **Anathema's** *Serenades* opus (where Ruth's delightful voice was first heard in the metal scene), did it not?

"Most definitely. That's what I mean, that's the one reason why we haven't done anything similar. That's why this album's stronger in our eyes because it hasn't got those reminiscences of the past, but being so fresh out of the bands it was bound to happen. Perhaps a sceptic would say we should have waited another year or half-year to record it, well maybe we should, but to be quite honest I'm glad we did it at the time because it gave us a good platform to look upon and decided what we were going to do next."

People often (unfairly) criticise Darren's voice on the albums.

"Again, people are frightened of change, if you've got a singer going "Orrrrrrrrrr" one minute, as soon as he starts to try and sing, people will think, "Ooh, why's he doing that?" People's ideology for bands a lot of the time really annoys me, it's a case of: "You were doing death metal at 100 miles per hour three years ago so why aren't you doing it anymore?" That's because all the bands three years ago that were doing it, where are they now? Look at **Morbid Angel** for instance, it hasn't helped them sticking to their guns, has it? I think Darren's got a good voice, I think he can sing. Obviously some people who like the gruff stuff might not like it, it's their fault. Bigoted people might listen to this album and think, "It's not the same as *Awaken*, I liked *Awaken*, I don't like this." Fine, at the end of the day we're doing it 'cause we like it first and foremost. There are a lot of bands that write to a formula and for a certain market but we don't, we just write what we think's cool at the time and bung it



Say hello to Steve and Wilma!

some people will jump to; "Oh, you've got a song called "I Believe" and "Prayer" on your album, it must mean that you're a Christian band", but it's got nothing to do with that whatsoever."

Is the short space of time (just over a year) between *Awaken* and *Mystica* indicative of prolific songwriting, or good old hard work?

"We're not a lazy band for starters," Paul points out, "we've actually done quite a bit of touring as well in between. I can't say how quickly we'll get the next album out but we've been in a fortunate position where things have gone smoothly with the record company, we got such a rush after *Awaken*, bonding with each other musically. After going out on tour with **My Dying Bride** and **Cathedral** for a month and a half, it really brought us together so much that when we came back, we were completely gelled up as it were, without sounding rude! We almost had such an adrenaline rush after everything happened, we're fairly creative anyway, I mean I've already got lots of ideas for the next album, I'd like to think all things being well that we could release one fairly soon. A lot of it does depend on touring as well; we did a lot of touring but there's only so much touring from one album. You find a lot of bands, as they get further on down the road [the duration between albums] becomes longer and longer simply because they've got a busier schedule. I'd like to think really that we can do a fair few albums as a band fingers crossed."

Sad irony now of course. Paul Allender left **The Blood Divine** shortly before this interview, leaving this 'ere Paul the only guitarist in the band. I asked Paul whether he envisaged that the sound be stripped down in future? I never guessed it would be stripped down to nothing.

"I don't think so, the first thing we did when Paul left, I got myself another guitar cabinet and some more gear to make up for it. This isn't in a snidey way, but the sound's actually a bit looser now, not because we didn't work as a six-piece, simply because now there's one of everything; one vocal, one guitar, one keyboard, so there's a little bit more clarity in what you can hear. The new stuff's actually worked so well with just the one guitar. I'm really looking forward to the challenge of doing the next album, with all my ideas on the guitar front, but I don't think it'll mean stripping down, if anything I want to try and compensate for there being one guitar. I think you have to do that, myself I wouldn't want to make it less, I'd want to make it more."

I mentioned to Paul that the *Mystica* material sounded remarkably ad-lib.

"Yeah, that's how we write, it wasn't improvised in the studio but we write exactly like that. We'll go to rehearsal, have a bit of a smoke or whatever and then we'll get on our instruments and just play. All the riffs that we've come up with that we personally think are the best ones have come from improvising. Without sounding all pompous, music does come [from] within, it's something you can either do or you can't. Was is always saying that because he's from the jazz camp, that's how they work, it's a case of "Get down, improvise" simple as that, rather than do it and you're good at it and it comes or it's not. That's how we write, and we find that's the best formula then. A lot of bands do write to a formula, a certain amount of soft songs, certain amount of heavy songs, certain amount of ballads out on an album and they'll stick to that formula for good, fine. I think the way we write by improvising will hopefully keep us always fresh. Although all the stuff in the studio is recorded live anyway, not even with a guide vocal. It was only a vocals and a few keyboard overdubs that we dubbed over; all the guitars, drums and bass were done completely live."

Visions of the Blues

"It is very democratic," Paul says when I ask how the band were accustomed to write. "We all put our two pennies worth. Again, there are a lot of bands that do have one



down."

At the time, Paul evidently felt that Darren had left the growling behind for good.

"He's definitely found his niche a lot more on this album, but again as people, I don't think we'll ever truly find our niche because we are always striving to be better, always striving for the next corner and the next thing. I'm always striving to do something different and better to what I've previously done, I think most people into music are like that. It's definitely a step forward on all the songs on the album. Darren and Ben have really experimented the most, and have found their feet a lot more on this album than the last one."

At the time Darren left I always felt it was **Anathema's** loss.

"I thought so as well, the very first thing I said, I got a phone call from him when he left (I was still in my previous band at the time) and turned round to Paul [Allender] and said, "He's bound to get something together soon, I can't wait to hear what he's going to do next". Luckily we got together and it's been good fun doing it, as simple as that, I think Darren's a good front-man."

Gelled up and on Adrenaline

A song from the *Mystica* album is entitled "I Believe" - what in? "I think Darren always writes with a twist, you can take them pretty much how you want. I reckon Darren's answer to it would be that he's very positive about the future - we all are - and that we believe in the band, we believe in ourselves, and we believe in the future. It's not a religious thing, which I know

person writing all the stuff, well fine, but personally speaking I think it can get very stale very quickly in that situation. If you can work together alright, brilliant, but a lot of bands can't work or get on like that, fortunately enough we can."

Is riff-making for Mr Ryan cathartic or is it drawing something in from the world around you and reprocessing it?

"Definitely you put your stamp on it. I come up with a riff, and one of the things that works well by improvising is that every time you play the song you've got the rough structure to it, you do something a little bit different like change this or that. It's only when you go into the studio that it actually finally goes onto analogue tape, but you'll quite often find that by putting your own personal thing to it after two or three times of playing the song, you might be doing something completely different, but it's something you're a lot happier with. So yeah, I'd say it definitely comes from within, music is a part of you, it's something that comes from you, simple as that."

Lyrical, the band were a one-man show.

"Darren does all the lyrics. I think it's the best way to work, Darren knows what he wants when it comes to lyrics. If we were lyricists, we'd go towards it, but it's an even par on musical input to lyrics. We're musicians and Darren isn't, he's got his ideas and will put his ideas in with music, we all write the music together, but none of us confess to being lyricists. If we were then we'd have an input, but as we're not Darren's best person for it and I think to be quite honest he's got it sewn up; he's got his ideas and his philosophies and what he wants to do, that's fine, he's the best person for it."

Is it easier to express oneself musically or lyrically?

"I think lyrically and musically you express yourself how you are anyway, it's different forms. Darren does express himself lyrically, I express myself musically, it's just two different things but it works for both. If you have a situation where you've got perhaps a guitar player who writes and sings, they'll express themselves in both forms, I just think it's a different form of expression."

You say you create atmospheres?

"We'd like to think that we do."

Is it that which differentiates music from noise?

"Not really, I'd say - going back to the question about music coming from within - atmospheres is the fact that if I'm feeling pissed off I might write a riff and it will come through in the music, and it will have that atmosphere of 'angry, nasty, not very nice'. There might be a time when I'm feeling particularly happy or positive about things, and I'll write a riff that sounds a bit happy, positive or making the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. It's only atmospheres in the sense of creating it as people. It's not like; "Oh, let's create a happy atmosphere, let's create a dark atmosphere", it's just all of us coming together in certain forms, the atmosphere is in ourselves anyway."

The songs on *Mystica* are a lot more focused, whereas those on *Awaken* went storming off on tangents.

"Again, it's all stemming down to the fact that we really were finding our feet on *Awaken*, and I don't want anyone to think that it wasn't our best effort 'cause it was, I'd like to think it's still a good album, but it is very much the case that we are a lot more together and a lot more gelled as a band on this album. It's only been a year since the last one came out, 'cause we want people to hear what we're like now as soon as possible, and through the label running (and continuing to run) quite smoothly, fingers crossed, that should be the case for the future as well."

On *Mystica* there is a lot of playing with effects pedals and so forth. Does this serve a real purpose or were you just playing with toys, as it were?

"It's adding to the atmosphere of what's going on at the time. Every time I get down to recording an album, you get that chance to do things you haven't done before. So I wouldn't say elements of 'toys'. There might be certain types of effect that you really like and you know would suit something, so you get a chance to use it. There's an element of that, and an element of the fact that's how it comes about for me and for the rest of the band; we say "Oh, we really like this effect, let's try it on that bit" and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work, but if we think it works, and it adds to the music then we'll use it."

Do you think bands are going ridiculous lengths too far for originality? What does Paul think about bands' use of their influences?

"My personal opinion is that people use influences too blatantly", he responds. "I want the band to sound like **The Blood Divine**, but might have influences from bands. I don't want the band to sound like **The Blood Divine** that have used a bit of drum 'n' bass or a **Led Zeppelin** riff. Everything goes in the melting pot, and comes out of it again, but it's how much you use basically. There are a lot of bands that are very obvious in their influences, but a lot of the bands that we like; you might get a band like **Zeppelin**, the way some people look on stuff is, "I really love that band, let's do it so people know about it". I don't look on it that way, I think to myself; "I really love that band, where are they coming from, what sort of things do they like?" and try and find out what sort of things they would listen to, and then have a listen to them. Apart from expanding your visions musically as it were, it gives you a good insight into where they are coming from, and rather than using blatant influences it gives you a chance to use a few more roots as it were. I listen to a lot of blues-type stuff, because a lot of my favourite bands, the majority of bands were influenced by that. **Maiden** are one of my favourite bands, it's very easy to let people know you like **Iron Maiden**, but they're into stuff like **Thin Lizzy**, **Deep Purple**, who in turn are into stuff like the blues - I went out and bought some records and checked loads of stuff out, just to broaden the horizons. I'd like to think that there are

influences in our music but they're only taken as an influence and not as part of the music, that's the main difference. People almost rip off their influences, maybe it's because - I can't say it without sounding pompous and big-headed - some people just aren't intelligent enough to listen to an influence and think; "I like that, I'll try and do it in my own way". They think; "I like that, let's do a riff exactly the same", which is fine because that's how most people start off in bands when they're very young, a riff from there, but that's how you build upon it; that's how people use it too blatantly."

I wouldn't have been surprised, had **The Blood Divine** not disbanded, to have seen a video clip from *Mystica*.

"We'd love to", Paul opines. "It's really a case of (a) money, and (b) the actual value of it, because that's always been the thing: brilliant, do a video, but we'd rather have the money so we can go out and tour. Especially seeing as now it's not really beneficial unless you're a big band who can release it commercially as well. Spending £7,000 on a video, to get a half-decent video - yes you can do one for £2-3,000 but anything that's worth its while - just to be shown on perhaps MTV's new programme, *Bravo* and perhaps a few channels in Europe is a fucking waste of money. If we were a big enough band to release it and people would go into the shops and they would buy it and feel happy with it, fine. To be quite honest, it's alright *Noisy Mothers* not being on and MTV scrapping *Headbanger's Ball*, it's really not worth anyone's while doing it."

Shouldn't the music, generally-speaking, make videos surplus to requirement?

"That's exactly it, that's another part of

it. Videos are completely pointless if you ask me. You've got to be very careful, you can make yourself look a right dick on a video. We've never really given it much thought, besides from the fact that it's a waste of money, we're a band. 99% of videos are completely pointless and stuck up their own arse anyway, and it's only an ego-trip for the people in the bands to go, "Oh look, I've got a video, oh look!" I know MTV did a live report when we toured with **MDB** and **Cathedral**, now that I did like because it was the band playing live, brilliant. I'm not the sort of person who would really get off on, "Oh wow look, there's me in my brand new clothes I bought for the video with my brand new guitar I've got just for the video looking really cool." That's not what I'm in it for. Anyone who would go out and buy clothes they perhaps wouldn't normally wear for that is guilty for a start."



One of these Filthites went on to form **The Blood Divine**. Do you know which? Here's a clue: it's not the bloke on the right...



Darren White

the band, and any vocal samples you hear are taken off conversations that Ben has taped. Ben's got a MiniDisc player and one of the things he likes to do - as keyboard players and most technical people do - is experiment with sound, and generally tape people speaking and having conversations, noise in the street. That was just taken from a conversation that Ben had with him; he's a good bloke basically. Tim's one of those people who's very knowledgeable, I can see him being the sort of person that would almost in the olden days gone off his head and been a prophet. He's that sort of person, he's got very good views on things. We just liked the way he was saying stuff and thought it fitted in well."

Despite the slightly '70s feeling to *Mystica*, it would have been nothing short of a crime to have labelled **The Blood Divine** together with such piss-awful stoner rock bands like **Acrimony**. "Personally speaking, it's not my bag," Paul admits, "but again, I really don't like stoner rock as a tag, as harmful as other tag going. I'm quite glad that we're not grouped in with it, it's very trendy at the moment, cool. I do like a lot of it, I like **Kyuss** and that's the way I see it. We've done gigs with a lot of bands that are classed as stoner rock, and we'll probably continue doing so, but I'm glad we don't get tagged as it."

It brings me on to something hinted at earlier. Stoner rock bands actively state that weed gives them much of their inspiration. I think that Paul recoils from the trendiness associated with the trumpeted 'coolness' of marijuana. But generally, how influential are drugs in the writing processes of bands? "Alternative music as it is today would not be about if it wasn't for people enjoying themselves and experimenting with things. Without committing myself to anything, if anyone ever turns round to me and says, "I don't know anyone that doesn't take drugs", I don't believe them, especially in this day and age there

are more people who do it than don't do it. I'm not saying, "Hey, it's cool to do it, hey, I do it all the time", but I would say that if it wasn't for the fact that people experiment, you wouldn't have 90% of the alternative music that's about today, you wouldn't have **The Beatles** for a start. I'm not going to commit myself to saying it's relevant to me, but I enjoy everything as much as the next man, but I'd say it's very very relevant to music today and alternative music past and present. Even stuff like jazz, all the great jazzmen liked to experiment, it's just how people are."

Blood, Urine and Spinal Tap

The Blood Divine were always keen to emphasise the importance of their music in the live arena. Still, with the first few gigs played they were criticised as looking nervous.

"Well, new band" Paul says simply. "After coming out of bands that have toured quite a lot and have been in that sort of routine, we probably were quite nervous. Now that we're a five-piece - we've only done a couple of gigs as a five-piece - I'll expect there'll be a fair bit of nerves at gigs in the future. Anyone from a band who gets on stage and says they're not a little bit nervous is lying, although maybe not big bands who are doing it all the time. [Playing with **My Dying Bride**] is not like just playing down your local pub. That's the best way to conquer it. We're a lot tighter as a band than we ever used to be and we always liked to think we were quite tight

live anyway."

Paul had mentioned earlier that their Hammond organ had been used at the Uxfest; that strange mini-festival west of London. Importantly for **The Blood Divine**, it was their first performance without Paul Allender.

"I thought we played really well, the gig was a pile of shit; badly-organised and had we known Uxbridge was so far out of London we wouldn't have even played it. It was alright as a gig, not bad, but I think there would have been double the amount of people there (a) if it had been advertised properly, and (b) if it hadn't been in fucking Uxbridge. One of those things. For a first gig as a five-piece I thought it went well."

A more successful festival the band played at in the summer of 1997 was the *With a Dragon's Blaze* festival in Belgium. Did the new stuff go down well, Paul?

"Went down real well. We got a stage invasion at the end of it so it was a good sign really. That was a really good gig, I really enjoyed that gig, it was a real good laugh going. We even managed to take a piss in the bucket of blood backstage that all the black metal bands were covering themselves with, which tickled us pink, so it was a good day all in all. The only thing was it was the hottest place - believe it or not - I've ever been to. I would have thought being Belgium it wouldn't have been that warm, but for some reason just that day it was unbelievably, dreadfully hot. There was **Dark Tranquillity**, **In Flames**, although **In Flames** just came on for the encore 'cause they played the night before. On our day, there was **Orange Goblin**, also **Electric Wizard** and a very very funny band - they played more than anyone, about an hour and a half - who played before us who had a guitarist who looked like Nigel Tufnell, and actually did a guitar solo in the middle of their set. The guy on guitar, good guitar player, but it would have been worth travelling over to Belgium to see him 'cause he was a reincarnation of Nigel Tufnell, exactly to the extent of the way he did his guitar solo. It could have been something out of **Spinal Tap**, and I don't mean that as any discredit. I was expecting to see fireworks coming out of his guitar or something funny to happen, it didn't but it was quite amusing really."

You've been lucky to share a stage with **Opeth**.

"Brilliant band, phenomenal musicians. The only people I would say are on a par with them who I've had the pleasure to play with live are **At the Gates**. Those two bands are the tightest, most musically-perfectionist two bands I've ever fucking seen. Really, unbelievably tight and good. I'm a big fan of the Swedish death metal thing, the guys out of **Opeth** are really talented."

The guitarist stresses that being an English metal fan is hardly appetising considering the lacklustre gig scene:

"It is really shit, especially compared to Europe. A lot of it stems down to the fact that there are a lot of crooked promoters over here, not wishing to name any names. There are a lot of people who will fly people over for instance and then - oh dear - not give them the money that they were owed. Then people wonder why bands don't like coming to England. It's happened to virtually every band that's come to England I'd say, unless they're through a reputable agent. A lot of the time small-time promoters will get bands over from Europe and not pay them, and it's not like the bands just come down the road



with a van (and even that's not nice to have happened) when someone's flown over, or they pay them their air fare and they come over and get no money from the gig."

It happened to **At the Gates** some years ago, as many will remember. "There have been plenty enough bands, it's just little fucking small-time promoters who aren't honest on paying the bands. My personal opinion is that you shouldn't promote the gig unless you've got the money to pay the bands for it. People stick to that theory in Europe: you won't go to many European gigs with people who have got a name (unless they've got the name of being a tosser) that you won't get paid for. They do realise that most people aren't going to be too pleased if they've come from another country and can't get home or they can't get their money or it's cost them money. My general attitude is if I have ever come across a promoter who promised me money, I've never put myself in the position where I've paid out of their own pocket. A lot of bands pay out of their own pocket for their air fare perhaps. If I had, and I didn't get the money promised, I'd be ripping the guy's clothes off and selling them to get the money. People in Britain seem to have this blasé attitude that they don't really care, which is a shame really. That's the first reason. The second reason is Britain is especially good for people moaning that there's no good gigs on, and when there is a good gig on, no one goes to it. A lot of it's down to transport but I think people who live in London or live in a big city who moan there's no gigs on and they can't afford to go to gigs and then never go to them, is half the reason why a lot of gigs don't go on. I know that if I lived in London, for instance, and it was only a tube fare and the price of a ticket to go in, I'd go to a lot more gigs. It's only because I'm an hour away and it's a pain in the arse to get down there, I don't go to a lot of gigs just because of the cost. But there are plenty enough people round London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bradford (although some places are better than others) that if they were really into having good gigs all the time and going to them as people make out, that's the root of the problem. Saying that now, maybe no one will come to our gigs, but it is true! If they've got the money people are - I don't know - picking their fingernails that night or down the pub for a half of orange or something, that's how people seem to be, I don't know why."

Serenading the Dirty Crib

Paul feels that no one should be able to get away with disdainfully brushing the band aside as a haven for **Anathema** and **Cradle of Filth** rejects:

"I think this album is definitely one in the eye for people who think we're trying to live off the reputation of our last band, because it's completely different. I don't try and dispel anyone from listening to our music, but the would-be extreme metal fan who only likes to extreme music and only appreciates anything to do with it, I would hope would listen to our album and throw up over the repulsive non-extremity of it. There are a lot of people especially from our past band's genre who might listen to one thing 'cause it's got certain influences or certain people into it and dig it. I don't agree with that. So yes, I'd say *Mystic*'s our first album in our own right and it's the first album where I think anyone who's into the band for the past bands - unless they like the band themselves - they'll make their minds up then."

Perhaps if you were Norwegian, the record company would have wanted to affix a sticker to your CD boxes, listing your previous bands like your curriculum vitae? It's hard to brush the **Cradle of Filth** period off, is it not?

"Exactly, they're a big band, it's not like I'll ever get away from it, but I don't want to be known as "Oh, I used to do this". I'm not 'disproud' of it, I don't mind talking about it. I'm not displeased with anything that I've ever done. I strive to do my best playing music, I'm happy. The fact remains: that was the past and this is the present therefore I'm very pleased that this album doesn't sound remotely like anything else I've done before."

Are you pleased your musical talent has helped **COF** sell loads of records?

"Well yeah, I'm happy from that point of view", Paul agrees. "The fact that I haven't seen a lot of the money off the records is a different matter. I'm still very proud of things I did in that band, I'd probably be a lot more proud if I got paid for a lot of the things I did when I was in that band, but that's the way the cookie crumbles in this game. I'm pleased if anyone's influenced by what I've done."

Indian Summer

Darren White went for an extended vacation to India some months before this interview. I wondered whether that had helped him in a creative way.

"I think he got a lot of influence from it," Paul muses, "he had time to sort his head out and think about things, eat a lot of nice food and travel around. He's had time to chill out and relax a bit really."

Would you ever want to do something like that? Get away from everything and everyone to clear your mind?

"I would do, if I had the money to do it, I'd travel a lot more

probably. I'm not a really travelly person but there's a lot of places I would like to go to. I think it's probably good to do that, good to get away from the rat-race as it were, once in a while, definitely good to clear your head. I quite often go to places to clear my head from things, because I think if you stagnate in one place for too long it can get on top of you, it's a good thing."

You said somewhere or other that art can and should be used to change your life, rather than just to make you feel better like "some feelgood movie"?

"Yeah, I think never say die really. Music's my one shot in life trying to do something different and trying to get out of the mire of people trying to survive, as it were. I do think it's something that should be looked upon as a door, as something to explore."

Has other music helped you generally to change your life?

"Yeah, music in general has helped me to change mine radically from year to year. It's just one of those things I think that from the start of listening to music and thinking: "Wow, I never realised I really liked music", to picking up a guitar and trying to play whatever. Each step that I take in that sort of field tends to broaden my horizons and change thinks that much more."

However much music in this genre is branded by outsiders as negative, if it helps you in any way that's surely no bad thing?

"Oh, most definitely, music's probably one of the most positive medicines you can take."

Finally then, one thing has been really bugging me. What is Was' first name, is it embarrassing?

"Wilma! No, only joking. I'm trying to think, William Arthur. I always call him Arnold. Have you seen that programme *Hey Arnold!* It's got loads of jazzy music and I always call him Arnold because of that. I know he wanted to put his full name on this album, I don't think he actually did in the end. It's not like he's called Rupert or anything."

Never let it be said that you don't learn something new every day.



Much material given to me for inclusion in this issue was rejected as substandard. This interview with **Prophanity** (who now have a cracking album out entitled *Stronger than Steel*) probably would have gone the same way were it not for an annoying half-page left before going to print. Conducted by the late Oliver Jenkins, I thought it might at least go to good use. It has been left almost entirely unedited, if that's any respect to the deceased.

Yet another melodic Viking/death five-piece from Sweden are **Prophanity**. They bring a certain charm to the sub-genre, adding unsubtle blasting brutality to the equation. I interviewed Anders "Wothaun" Malmström shortly after the release of their rather good cassette-EP *The Battleroar*...

Greetings Anders, how's the weather and what are you listening to? What are your faves so far this year?

"Greetings Oliver. Well, the summer has just arrived so it's fucking hot. The stereo pounds out metal from **Mercyful Fate's** *In the Shadows*. Feels real great. I've bought **Crown of Thorns'** new *Eternal Death* and **Dimmu Borgir's** *Enthrone Darkness Triumphant* lately. Call them my faves of this year. How about yourself in Leeds?"

Me? I'm typing to the tune of **Morbid Angel's** classic *Altars of Madness* LP and yes, it's so hot I can't even get out of bed without breaking into a sweat. Anyway, your new cassette-EP sounds very professional, how has the response been so far compared to your old material? Has it been easier to get gigs and have you played any good shows recently?

"The response so far has been great. Compared to what we've released in the past people think we've progressed, but if it's in the right or wrong way, I don't know. For us it's just a natural step. Right now we're concentrating on getting the cassette spread in the underground so it has not been easier to get gigs. We'll have to await the autumn to see. We played our latest gig in spring this year and it went well for us. Anyhow, the crowd sucked."

Ahhh... underground apathy, don't you just love it? As well as being more professional, your new material sounds quite different to the *I Vargens Tecken 7*". Is this due to line-up changes? Oh yeah, is

Christer Olsson still playing in **Forlorn**? What the fuck, how about a short history of the band and the members' other projects? (You're Swedish, so there should be a few...)

"The difference in our music can just be called progress. Our new material was made before we recruited Niklas on guitar and Robert on bass. So these guys did not bring **Prophanity's** sound to where it is today, but surely they will develop our music further."

"OK, it's time for me to bore you. **Prophanity** started up by Matthias "Farbaute" and Christer "Grendel" in late '91. It took almost two years and a new number of bass and drum players before I joined the band. And of course we have had problems, shit like line-up problems, rehearsal room burglary etc. And before our new cassette we've released two demos and a 7". Nowadays we're standing strong with a complete line-up since Niklas (ex-**Nightshade**) and Robert (ex-**Septic Grave**) joined the hordel. We have no time for other projects like we did a couple of years back except for the fact that me and Christer are playing in another local band called **Immemo-real**. We're rehearsing with that band when we record something once or twice a year so it's not that hard."

"If **Forlorn** still exists I think Christer Olsson is playing with them but that's not our guitarist. I guess it's about 600 kilometres between these two Christer Olssons so it's lucky there are two of them!"

Oops, my mistake... When I heard your older stuff I got the impression you were a black metal band. You used pseudonyms and an inverted crucifix in your logo. You've now dropped the names (wasn't Wouthan more of a pagan name anyway?) but do you/did you have any Satanic beliefs/philosophies? Are you into magic? If not, what do you think about people with serious occult ideologies?

"We still use our pseudonyms but not in the shape that we did, except for our singer. I just felt for a "name change" and it ended up as it is now. You're just right that Wouthan is of a pagan nature, and the same goes for Farbaute and Grendel. The pagan inspiration is just the way for **Prophanity**."

"For my sake, I don't have any religious beliefs. I don't need to bow for something that discriminates the human nature, whatever the religion is called. Of course I have philosophies like everyone else but I can't say that they are of a religious kind."

"If people are seriously into the occult ideology, what can I say? Of course I respect them. I have friends who are into it and they aren't worse human because of their ideologies."

I think I would describe your current sound as **In Flames** with a bit more of a 'Viking' feel and more brutality. Don't you think that there are enough bands playing this stuff already (especially in Sweden)? If you look at the recent releases of labels like, say, No Fashion, almost every band has this sound (with the exceptions of **Dark Funeral** and **Throne of Abaz** of course...)

"I've heard many descriptions of our sound and I guess what you describe might not be completely wrong, but I think what we've created doesn't clone our band. We're just bringing forth our kind of metal, and yes it's melodic, aggressive and brutal. I can agree with you that there are almost too many bands from here that use this melodic approach in their music, but how many use their brains while they're making it. Everything gets fucking boring when people copy everything from the more well-known bands."

Have **Prophanity** received much attention from the land of labels yet? Any preferences as to who you might sign with?

"We've got a couple of offers so we are negotiating about the terms and how the contract will be. I think we'll be signed somewhere when this mag comes out. I don't have a fav label but it would be cool to sign to a label which doesn't have any metal bands. Maybe **Marianne Records**?"

Who? Time for a deep question Anders. Where do you think the future lies for Mankind? Do you think we will last long enough to colonise Mars etc. and start afresh? Or do you think that science is too motivated by money now to truly help, rather than hinder, the human race?

"Interesting question, but I don't care if we colonise other planets or what now the human race might do. The way we live now, almost nothing can hinder Mankind for their extinction. The next step for us is a kick back to the dark age. We're all falling in oblivion. But, I don't see my world through pessimistic eyes, the paradox!"

Anything to add?



"Thanx Oliver for this interview and support. People interested in **Prophanity** should write now, god damn it! Or write and ask for a mail-order list from B.S.W. Prod. **Prophanity's** new cassette *The Battleroar* costs 30SEK or \$6 from me. Cheers in beers!"

PROPHANTY, ARRENEGATAN 207, S-44156 ALINGSAS, SWEDEN.

Bewitched Leams

Walk down Fortis Green in East Finchley, London on a winter afternoon and you'd probably never guess that the road was home to an extreme metal record label. Or an underground artist and his musical project. But it is, and the man behind it all is one Alex Kurtagic. His art has adorned covers from artists such as **Tormentor** and **Dimmu Borgir**, he releases records by the likes of **Deinonychus**, while his own baby **Bewitched Leams** constantly flummoxes those who dare approach it.

He's quite a character, this Kurtagic (sorry, no acute accent on that final 'c' - blame it on that Gates fellow), as reading any of his interviews will reveal. He was after all, the man who took the risk of saying in *Godreab* that National Socialism was too left-wing, knowing that the statement was bound to be misconstrued and misunderstood. He's also the man whose lyricism never fails to explore seldom-leafed pages of the most obscure dictionaries. Otherwise he remains a mystery, his public appearances only notable by his "handsome appearance". His words, naturally.

Alex's accent betrays the fact that English is not his first language. He neglects to reveal more about his background, although I have an idea that Eastern Europe is your best bet if you cared to guess where he's from. The more relevant question to ponder is why he set up shop in England?

"The advantages of operating in England are its more favourable tax regime (at least for the moment and as compared with continental Europe), the fact that it is a powerful and highly-industrialised economy, the fact that overall services are relatively efficient, and the fact that the national temperament and work ethic are fairly well-suited to my own. The only disadvantage I can think of is that the market for extreme Metal is smaller than it could be, and that there is only *one* monthly extreme Metal publication."

Alex's Supernal Music prides itself on a formidable, efficient mail-order service, and the release of the odd record besides those of his own **Bewitched Leams**. His latest venture has been the creation of **Conquistador Records**; a sub-label dealing exclusively with bands from the American continent. I asked him if the distances involved were any obstacle to the levels of efficiency with which Alex prided himself on operating under.

"Believe it or not," he says, "the distance is not a problem. It is the same for me to deal with **Bewitched** as it is for me to deal with **Fleurety**; it is just as easy to call/fax/e-mail to a number/address in Chile as it is to call/fax/e-mail to a number/address in Norway. Obviously, the South American style of doing business is different from the Northern European style, but as long as one is aware of this and adapts accordingly (which I can do, because amongst other places I lived in South America for a while and am fluent in Spanish), at the end of the day the goals are the same for both."

As for the reason for the focus on America, predominantly south of the equator, Mr Kurtagic feels that he is unearthing a wealth of untapped talent

"There is a wealth of very good (and very obscure) talent in (South) America which has thus far remained criminally ignored. It has also to do with the fact that the European scene has grown so bloated and incestuous that from a broad perspective it has become almost completely homogenised and I think we will all benefit from the obscure, raw, brutal, and bizarre extreme Metal that is produced in that region of the world."

The Gentleman with the Long Hair

Alex has exposed a desire to take the whole genre forward, both musically and intellectually. As he stated in *Terrorizer* some time ago, his "musical mission is to bring a higher level of intellect, sophistication, and education to extreme metal". Is it possible though to reconstitute metal as a serious form of musical expression (does it not revel in its role as a musical pariah?), and when will he know that he has succeeded?

"Well," he answers, "extreme metal will always be a form of pop music and, as such, even if it is considered an extreme form of musical expression, it is hardly radical from an artistic point of view: the

compositional devices that are considered avantgarde nowadays were explored already with classical instruments decades, even centuries, ago. The truly avantgarde stuff is on labels like Touch, which most people save a select few obscurant eggheads find utterly insufferable."

One wonders whether Alex here is eggheadbanger enough to include himself among the obscurantists he mentions.

He continues:

"What I meant when I said that my musical mission was to bring a higher level of intellect, sophistication, and education to extreme Metal, was that I wish

to gentrify extreme Metal and take (at least part of) it away from the moronic stereotypical image it traditionally enjoys. Of all the forms of pop music, I like extreme Metal best not only because it is dark and obscure, but also because it is closest to high art in the way it is about taking risks and superseding existing limits, even if it has the same tendency as other forms of pop music to periodically lapse into stylistic stagnation and self-parody."

I don't disagree with that assessment, although some individuals are increasingly keen to distance themselves from heavy metal culture. Just take Erik from *Ulver*. In *Slayer* #11, he deems black metal as: "[ultimately influenced by] **Venom**... beer-drinking, base-minded rabble, icons of heavy metal idiocy... Just look at our audience: the average Black Metal record buyers is a stereotypical loser: a good for nothing who was teased as a child, got bad grades at school, lives on social welfare and seeks compensation for his inferiority complexes and lack of identity by feeling part of an exclusive gang of outcasts uniting against a society that has turned them down."

Do I hear a collective "Ouch!?" I suppose Alex here is far too shrewd a businessman for too much agreement with this assessment?

"The contact I have with metal enthusiasts is almost exclusively over the telephone, and, at least with me, they always sound reasonably polite and civilised, so my shrewd businessmanship does not dictate in this case my not providing you with the kind of good copy someone like Erik, who spends time in the live circuit and is in direct contact with fellow metal enthusiasts, has already provided. I don't think people who are interested in metal are automatically losers, because there are metal enthusiasts I have met or spoken to who are simply individuals with an intellectual curiosity (and an aesthetic appreciation) for the obscure and the extreme. I do think, nevertheless, that the stereotypical metal way of life is very appealing to the good-for-nothing, indolent, dim-witted loser Erik is so fond of, because both are considered unacceptable and are marginalised by a society that values proficiency and success, as Erik has accurately observed."

Genetic Engineering

Has Alex found that pressures of time running Supernal Music have resulted in the artistic side of Alex Kurtagic being pushed to the side or been compromised to accommodate the astute businessman in him?

"I seriously wish the Earth rotated on its axis at half its current speed, or that I could at least have my brain boosted by neural nanonic implants and my consciousness spread amongst a dozen vat-grown, genetically engineered Alex Kurtagic clones. Yet, as the technology to achieve this remains unavailable for the moment, I have to content myself by being organised and disciplined, so that I may be able to do all I want, can, and have to do within the existing time constraints. Still, I would not say

that the artist in me is being stifled, as being a businessman also requires creativity and combining both the artist and the businessman is simply a matter of formatting one's mind in the right way."

Without wishing you to overdose on humility and tact, how does the man critically evaluate the styles and work of other renowned 'metal painters' in the scene, Joe Petagno and Kristian Wählin?

"You are an insult to journalism! How can you bring yourself to ask me such a somniferous question? Do you by any chance harbour a secret hatred for **Bewitched Leams**, and, wishing to make me appear dull and uninteresting, formulate your questions in a fashion calculated to demand only dull and uninteresting responses?"

Oops, I forgot that "humility" and "tact" are about the only words Kurtagic doesn't understand. But come on, I'm the one asking the questions here, answer mine!

"I evaluate Joe Petagno's style as the more practical of the two in the context of the commissioning process and dynamics, but nevertheless prefer Kristian Wählin's style purely on the basis of its luxurious aesthetics."

There you have it, he doesn't even need to be diplomatic with those two.

Forensic Cynicism

It's not entirely surprising that a man known for his wordiness thought up one of the best advertising slogans for an underground metal album. The album in question was **Deinonychus' Ark of Thought** and the catchphrase was the succinct, "Guaranteed to wipe the smile off your face." "I am pleased to learn that you appreciated that line in the **Deinonychus** advertisements and I am obviously taking note of the fact that it has generally elicited a good response (both in the form of comments and sales), so that I may repeat my success with future advertisements."

So said Alex, when I put it to him that your average sales point doesn't tread further than, say, "Superb black metal" or "Sympho-majestic pagan metal". "The advertisement tactics in the underground record industry", he adds, "are generally quite basic: it is clear that those responsible for the advertisement have an overall grasp of the principles and the aesthetics of the music rather than by professionals with the required level of devious cunning and psychological insight. I believe that I do have that devious cunning and psychological insight, as well as a grasp of the principles and the aesthetics, but that I have not mastered the techniques yet and thus I still waste considerable sums of money in ineffective advertisement. This, though annoying from any perspective, is nevertheless perfectly normal, as advertisement is a career in itself and the point where the extreme Metal scene is only just now reaching the point where the biggest labels can afford professional advertisement services."

Alex has also briefly forayed into journalistic investigative territory. The mail order catalogues for Supernal Music customers used to include interviews with artists of the man's choice. These were often entertaining, largely through their ultra-cynical, Jeremy Paxman-style attack. This was halted, presumably due to time constraints, but were these interrogations a fist in the face of scyphantic, super-sugar-coated interviewers?

"Actually, the ultra-cynical approach I employed in my interviews was a tactic designed to cause the interviewees to react in wrong and awkward ways that would reveal something about their real personalities and character, without the opaque veil of the pre-prepared, super-soporic, image-miraging answers a lot of them keep in their computers."

There are of course exceptions, in the case of **Endura** whose answers are essays in their own right.

"I obviously derived great pleasure doing the interviews, and was sorry to have to discontinue them due to the time constraints you correctly speculated."

Workaholic

Alex has previously revealed that he puts in a stupendous working week (80-100 hours, mentioned in *Lesengrim* #2) on Supernal Music. Is this slavishly hard work ethic the price of sculpting and maintaining a top-class label or is good old, sheer efficiency the cornerstone? Did you notice a niche in the market for better-organised mail orders and distros when he started out?

"If you look at the most successful entrepreneurs in the world, you will find that they are invariably extremely focused and hardworking, so I think the stupendous working week is necessary if one wants to do more than just "get by".

Before I started I used to buy CDs from **Cacophonous Records'** mail order, and this gave me a very good idea of both the weaknesses and strengths of a mail order business as well as the experience of being an extreme metal mail order customer."

The label recently held a summer sale, whereby certain individual CDs were offered at the unheard of price of £8.75. Is this not financial suicide? Clearly Alex will disagree, but wasn't this a gamble? "Periodic sales are consistent with any sound business strategy and part of the yearly cycle for any business



The man smells a fish:
 "I can tell you without even bothering with formulas and calculations that your elapsed travel time on the craft is wrong. At 1g (9.81 m/s²) it would take a little under a year for presumed cosmonauts on the spacecraft to accelerate to the speed of light at which point the distance outside the craft would have shrunk to zero, according to Einstein's special theory of relativity. Assuming that the cosmonauts program the craft to accelerate to just short of the speed of light and then decelerate at the rate you have given, they should be able to get to the centre of the galaxy (and for that matter to anywhere else in the universe) and back in a little over four years (not a little over forty, like you say). In proper time, the time elapsed would be numerically equal to that of the distance in light-years plus a little over four years."
 Well, we may have caught him out, since I doubt an astrophysics degree question (however simple it may be) would be a trick. My sources failed to recover an answer for the time being, but if there's anyone out there who's into the subject, let us know! There might be something in it for the first correct answer. Besides proving Mr Kurtagic wrong, that is.

BENIGHTED LEAMS, 27 FORTIS GREEN, LONDON N2 9JL, ENGLAND.

the guitars down (to the benefit of their sound) and lets the synth ring through.

"We feel that the *Battle Magic* production is the best we have yet achieved", Byron confidently states. "The synths will continue to play an increasingly dominant role as time progresses. We build our songs around the keyboards; most of the songs are written on the keyboards. We are not a guitar oriented band, and as such, the guitars will generally take second place to the keyboards in the mix. We are however, still a very heavy band; the guitars are down-tuned to 'B', they retain a very abrasive sound, and they compliment the synths perfectly. But at the end of the day, our main musical strong-point is not guitars, it is keyboards, and that's the instrument we will continue to emphasise, increasing the dynamism and complexity of the keyboards with each new work."

Tell us how the **Bal-Sagoth** song-writing engine works, Byron. Is it a case of your lyrics fuelling the creation of Jonny Maudling's riffs, or do you attempt to fit the prose around the music?

"It's a bit of both" he says. "Sometimes I'll approach Jonny with a lyrical concept or story and ask that he write music to fit it, which was the case with the *Circus Maximus* epic, and other times he will present me with a piece of music for study and approval. The good thing is that Jonny and Chris now fully understand the thematic and lyrical nature of the band, and their riffs and compositions now invariably fall perfectly into what I call "the **Bal-Sagoth** concept". Jonny generally requests that I provide key words or a generalised synopsis of a concept or story to generate a spark of synergy which is then allowed to grow and develop until the music and lyrics are finally fused in the studio. In the old days, I would present lyrical phrases and lines and the music was often crafted specially to fit a particular stanza or passage, but now I much prefer the latent synergetic transferral of ideas method, which is how our work evolves best. A glorious harmony of concept, intent, and realisation." Perhaps one reason why we have seen so little of **Bal-Sagoth** on the live stage has been their parsimonious line-up. With Jonny Maudling the natural synth player in the band, as well as the drummer, gigs require an extra keyboardist. Said problem has been solved with the addition to the ranks of one Dave Mackintosh in mid-1998.

"Indeed", Byron fills us in, "we have recently recruited a new drummer, and we have also replaced our old bassist with a new recruit in the shape of one Mark Greenwell, both new additions being specifically to enable us to play the material live. Live shows will thus remain a part of **Bal-Sagoth**, and yet the simple fact of the matter is that our true strength and potency shines forth only when we are in the studio recording albums. That is the primary focus of the band, the main reason for its existence. We will always set the utmost store by our recorded work, and live shows will always, without doubt remain forever secondary to the studio aspect of the band. Certainly, gigs are an enjoyable aspect of it all, but we will always be a band who concentrate first and foremost on getting new albums out, because at the end of the day, this band exists to create new songs, craft new ideas, and record ever more wondrous and cosmic albums for people to experience. Indeed, the writing of the fourth album is now well underway, and it promises to be a truly spectacular opus, steeped in stellar magnificence and astral power."

I wouldn't want anything less. Anyway, the new drummer hails from the city of Cambridge (somewhat peculiarly), and should be able to elaborate a little on the somewhat functional style of

Mr Maudling, who is primarily a keyboard-player by inclination. Does Byron agree?

"We have indeed secured the services of Mr. Mackintosh, the compact dynamo from Cambridge. He was actually told of the opening by a mutual friend, and landed the job after auditioning. Our new bassist Mark is also from Cambridge, being an old friend of Dave's. With Jonny and Chris both hailing from Kent, I remain the only Yorkshireman in the bed. (They hate it when I bring that up!) But yes, the plan is for Dave to play drums on future albums, which will leave Jonny more time to spend concentrating on the keyboards. Jonny's drumming style may not have been technically perfect, but what it way have lacked in finesse it more than made up for in passion and innovation, so don't sell him short! The drums on our albums have always had a very barbaric, warlike feel, and Dave, being a stickman of consummate skill, will certainly bring a new element of depth and ability to the drums, while at the same time retaining that trademark barbarity."



Scrolls of Legendry

Bal-Sagoth's three albums have all been manhandled by Cacophonous Records. Byron reports that bigger fish have expressed an interest in signing the band, notably the giant German company Nuclear Blast:

"We have not yet decided which label we'll sign to for future albums. I'm still studying contractual proposals from both Cacophonous and Nuclear Blast, and it's a very time consuming process. Yes, Nuclear Blast are a bigger label, but at the end of the day it will come down to which company agrees to let us retain the most creative control over our work, which is of paramount importance to this band."

Some people may pass off the whole **Bal-Sagoth** concept as immature or dated. Swords and sorcery type stuff conjuring images of adolescent nerds playing *Dungeons & Dragons*. Even for the cynic though, as I might label myself, one read

of the detailed lyrics in the most recent **Bal-Sagoth** inlay booklet, and it all starts to make sense. Byron is clearly fully involved with what he is doing, and the passion rubs off on some of the most spellbound lyrics this side of, err... well anywhere really. Surely though, the man sees why people such as I have concerns over the *Battle Magic* cover art. Isn't it giving off the wrong signals?

"I don't think the cover will put anyone off, indeed there's no reason whatsoever why it should. A lot of other bands' covers have been a lot more comic-book oriented in style than ours after all. Our music and lyrics are very dynamic, very colourful and very animated, so we need a cover to reflect that. Would people rather we used a darkly abstract indefinable image, or another photo of a forest or nude woman like so many other bands insist on using time and again? Our work basically tells a story, and so the cover should also embody a visual narrative art form to compliment the aural one on the albums. Our work is very over the top, very bombastic and pulse-poundingly vibrant, and the accompanying graphics will continue to mirror that style and intent. Why should people regard the term "comic book" in a derisive or negative context? There's no reason to equate the term with unsophistication. I don't care if people accept or embrace the terminology or not; we do what we do, call it what we like, and we're damn proud of it!"

Fuck, I'm not going to argue with that. After all, the life of one man with conviction in his unfashionable beliefs is

worthier than a hundred limply and unthinkingly following the current trend.

Byron clearly sees that, despite the misgivings of certain sections of the media, he admits that he owes the British fans a debt of gratitude:

"Our home country remains a wellspring of a very passionate and devoted cult following. Admittedly, the numbers of fans we have in the UK probably does not compare to the legions of fans we have in Greece, Eastern Europe, or Italy, for example, but all our handful of UK gigs over the years have been characterised by a very enthusiastic crowd response. Album sales in the UK are



Ignore the patronising comments often directed at **Bal-Sagoth** by certain members of *Terraviva* staff. These boys play from their hearts, and play damn well. Their third album, *Battle Magic* proved slightly elliptical on the first listen, but with patience blossomed into another gem; excellent songwriting (albeit with the odd questionable section) and music just oozing feeling. There's still work needed, perhaps on the more risible blips, but the latest **Bal-Sagoth** full-length has more sheer musicality than displayed in almost any album related to the black metal genre. And the band have something to show for it. Let's face it, besides youknowwho, how many new English metal bands since 1994 have made any noticeable impact on a global level? Byron Roberts, vocalist/narrator/saga-spinner, is understandably pissed off that there is so little support from the home press:

"The UK mainstream metal press has generally failed to understand *Battle Magic*. These magazines are steeped in a dire lack of imagination and are devoid of passion, scoffing at anything which does not fall into a neatly categorised and easily definable niche. Bands who refuse to chum out mainstream recycled pap will invariably be derided by such gutter press publications. For those mags to have derided us must mean that we are succeeding in our quest, that quest being to create something different, something which will terrify the mainstream trendy rock/metal music world and spit a big "fuck you" in its jaded face. Those with limited imagination and small minds have failed miserably to embrace our work, as such art is quite simply beyond their feeble powers of comprehension. The music of **Bal-Sagoth** requires that the listener have a spark of passion within them and an imaginative soul. Our music is a wondrous journey to the infinite realms beyond... but not everyone may accompany us on that journey."

The biggest change between the breakthrough *Starfire...* and the third album has been the increasing dominance of the keyboards. While the *Starfire...* production allowed the weight to be carried on the guitars, the low-end sound was questionable on occasion. The latest mix tones



very good, even compared to the bigger markets like Germany & Greece, so we're most satisfied by our steadfast British support. People should listen to a band themselves and not take the feeble views of the rock press as gospel. At the end of the day, we are a very British band, and particularly a very English band, and a lot of people have picked up on that here on this island and embraced our work with a fervent devotion. I don't think we'd have many more fans here even if we'd played more gigs over the years. We are ultimately a very extreme band in a lot of respects, and people's response to us is equally extreme; they either love us or they hate us, and we wouldn't have it any other way."

Byron is well aware that the vagaries of the press don't accurately reflect those of the record-buying public.

"We're not trendy, we're not flavour of the month, nor will we ever be, and we don't pander to what the sheep-like mainstream metal buying public want. We're **Bal-Sagoth**, we're unique, and our legend shall endure forever."

Cybermusik

The support slot for **Emperor** in the summer of 1997 was clearly a watershed in the history of **Bal-Sagoth**.

"That was a great gig," Byron agrees, "great crowd response, and a very important show for us. It was our first UK show for over 2 years, and it was important that our return was a high profile event like that gig with **Emperor**. It was a perfect bill, the fan crossover between the two bands was very high, and it was a great return to England after having played some twenty three gigs throughout Europe some weeks earlier. It was also the beginning of our alliance with **Emperor**, which continued with us doing a full European tour with them later that year."

The differences between the two bands are greater than you might think from what Byron says, not least as **Bal-Sagoth** are altogether more influenced by the whole filmscore thing. Byron Roberts feels that the experience could materialise into something more substantial in due course.

"We are not at all wary of increasing the soundtrack aspect of our music," he begins, "indeed that aspect will continue to grow ever more dominant in our work as we progress. Absolutely all of the fan letters I receive praise the soundtrack element of the music and demand more and more of that kind of thing. It's simple; the people who like guitar bands can listen to their guitar bands, while the people who want soundtrack-metal can listen to us! And yes, I think that the only correct way to experience our work is with lyric book in hand and headphones on. That is the only way in which the eldritch spell of **Bal-Sagoth** can be fully felt. A listener's imagination and the images he or she creates in the mind are invariably far more effective than any direct visual representation can convey, and as time progresses, people will be able to ever more fully immerse themselves in the wondrous universe of **Bal-Sagoth**."

He's clearly warming to the theme.

"One day, people will be able to plug our albums directly into their brains via cerebral neuro-interfaces, and actually enter the world which exists within the albums. Until that day dawns, there may at some point be a video. I have storyboarded several ideas, and there have been long standing plans to hire Emmy Award winning director Jeremy Freeston to direct. He specialises in period pieces, and would be the perfect man for the job within the framework of our inevitably limited budget. Of course ideally, we would love to utilise a multi-million pound budget, and employ the services of Industrial Light & Magic... and who knows? Perhaps one day that will come to pass."

And until that day, we'll have to rely on Byron's written stories and songlyrics. He feels that there is a general absence of talent in this department, even from bands with English as a first language.

"English is indeed the universal lyrical language, and few bands, most lamentably English ones, take full advantage of the mother tongue. I always try to make the lyrics for each album an event, as they are the aroma which feeds and defines the mammoth **Bal-Sagoth** engine. The art of storytelling is unfeasibly ancient, and that is what our albums do; they tell a story. There's no political motivations as such, no religious preaching, there are just epic tales with a latent hidden meaning or two for the more erudite reader to discover. Readers of the **Bal-Sagoth** lyrics can glean so much more enlightenment about the songs and stories if they take the time to study the lyrics, many of which are presented in prose form and not given voice within the actual songs. This way, hidden secrets may be discovered, extra information can be learned, and shrouded significances can be found within the wordcraft. The whole concept of **Bal-Sagoth** as I envisioned it is exclusively lyrically based, and it required a musical platform of suitably symphonic and epic proportions for it to be given flesh, and this is what has been achieved. Those people who don't like to read or who only like to listen to the music are free to put down the lyric book. Those who require the full **Bal-Sagoth** experience will find that little tome an indispensable companion guide along the journey."

Doesn't it all take up a lot of time, writing the vast tracts of text, only some of which will be edited down to form the finished lyric?

"The time taken to write the lyrics varies, as does the amount of revision between drafts", Byron answers. "There are many more chapters to the existing songs yet to be told, just as there are countless wholly new stories yet to see print. And to answer the majority of queries received since the release of the third album; yes, the

Hyperborean Empire saga will continue soon, with the most cataclysmic chapter yet. Whether it continues on an album or in another form of narrative media, I have yet to decide."

For the debut, Byron's lyrics were largely completely fantastic, but recent offerings have demonstrated an increasing fascination with history proper.

"I have always been interested in history," the man reveals, "particularly military history, and the inception of historically based lyrics alongside the fantasy pieces on the new album was the culmination of a long held desire. I have long been fascinated by ancient warcraft, and it is a fascination which extends roughly up to the widespread introduction and use of gunpowder and firearms in battle. The clash of gleaming phalanxes, the charge of heavy cavalry, the claron of steel on steel and the howl of shafts as they slice the air, all these aspects of battle fervently intrigue and captivate me. The roar of artillery and the rumble of tanks less so, although even modern warfare is of more than passing interest to me. It has always been in man's nature to make war, and it always will be. In battle, empires are lost and won, kingdoms fall, and glorious legends are forged. And of course we must not forget the stench of carrion, the call of crows as they feast upon the slain, the bloating of maggots and the black clouds of flies on the battlefield, and the corpse mounds piled high in the aftermath of carnage. Both these concepts are different sides to the same martial coin of combat. War is a constant. It will exist as long as mankind endures."

It seems fatuous to point out here that war itself is never a particularly pretty experience.

Under One Flag

"It is true that bands do have a limited shelf life," Byron says as he ponders on the fact that **Bal-Sagoth** have endeavoured to remain true to their craft, "particularly in this scene and genre of music. Therefore it is important for bands to achieve as much as they can while they can. But in doing so, they should not compromise their artistic integrity, they should not betray their roots or their initial all important intents.

True, the business of selling records is that of selling an illusion, and promoting something which is essentially illusory and ethereal, but always there must be a core of adamant steel, a basis of immovable stone. We don't care about making money, or being the fan favourite of the week, we believe in what we do, and we do it because we have an artistic fire ablaze within ourselves. Some people may respect that while others may consider it folly, but everyone must at least acknowledge it as honourable. Although we may evolve and progress, the same spirit and intent which made our first album will be unchanged throughout the entire duration of this band's existence."

Ecce Homo

It's not every day that an extreme metal act achieves a sponsorship deal with a retail outlet. Byron doesn't think that the relationship between **Bal-Sagoth** and the English arms and armour company Battle Orders is in danger of compromising their integrity.

"I perceive no danger of reliance on commercial means within the framework of the Battle Orders endorsement" he ensures me. "I hope all our fans buy a sword from Battle Orders, and take great pleasure from caring for their blade. The Battle Orders sponsorship is more an ideological thing than a commercial one, at any rate. And I do not at all mind being associated with the fantasy market, be it books, games, films, films whatever... the more people who discover our work and gain something spiritual from it, the better. As for the heavy metal community; a lot more of our fans these days are hailing from that scene as well as the extreme metal one. Perhaps we are destined to unite the tribes and bridge the artistic divides... or perhaps not."

All this slightly macho swordsman posturing is clearly at odds with the current, politically correct idea of what being a man is about.

Byron is indignant: "I think all this 'new man' business is utter rubbish, silliness spawned from the inane minds governing the fashion and leisure industries. Every man must establish his own code of honour and behaviour, and far too many fools these days are far too concerned with the images and behaviour patterns which trend-ridden modern society bombards the populace with every day of its existence."

I quite agree. Although when I ask him to whom he turns, things get a little ridiculous:

"Today's ideal male role model?" he ponders. "Luke Skywalker, Captain America, Robin Hood, Bruce Lee or Spider-Man. (and Xena Warrior Princess... we could all learn a few things from her!)"

Ash, Oak, Elder and Yew

A thorough reading of the lyrics on *Battle Magic* will reveal cute snatches of patriotic heathenism, such as:

"Beneath the oak I rest bone-weary,
Thirsting for a horn of ale or jug of mead,
But how could a heathen man wish for anymore
Than the healing balms of English trees?"

It's probably only a matter of time before **Bal-Sagoth** get labelled as right-wing nutters for the crime of displaying an English flag in one of their promotional photos. I put it to Byron that it is perhaps this guilt-ridden "ashamed-to-be-English" attitude that gives rise to nationalistic venting of anger through the actions of our football hooligans.

"It is true", he muses, "that the English do not tend to display patriotism in as open a manner as certain other nationalities. This is a shame, because England is the best country in the world, and when other countries indulge in displays of nationalism, they are in fact doing it because they feel so inferior to England! England was once the centre of the greatest empire the world has ever seen, and we invariably win all wars we fight in. The world knows how great we are, so we often see no need to keep ramming it down their throats. That whole 'stiff upper lip' and noble concealment of emotions is a contributory factor. It is often only at football matches that a fervent English patriotism emerges, but there it is frequently perpetuated by people whose intentions are perhaps not as honourable as they could be. I figured that it was about time that an English band stood up, stepped out of the shadow of jingoistic Americans and Scandinavians, and proclaimed how fucking great it was to be from this green and pleasant land. And if it offends anyone, well tough fucking luck! All hail **Bal-Sagoth**... all hail England!!!!"

As I introduced the last question to Byron in the form of a song lyric, I'll try the same trick again. On the *Starfire*... album was a lyric with more than a hint of Tolkien infused:

"Darkly bejewelled circlet of night,
The crown of the elder king,
Unfettered at last, the trinity of might:
The sceptre, the sword and the ring."

Byron has never failed to point out his refusal to accept the rubbishing of this symbolic trinity for the modern nihilism of lager, football and Oasis. What, dare I ask, has Byron fathomed as his meaning of life?

"Truly, I do have a contempt for the jaded and apathetic state of drugged and desensitised existence which most unenlightened people these days think of as life. I do not profess to have all the answers as to how to reawaken mankind's spiritual dormancy or reactivate slumbering sections of humanity's psyche (although I do have a few ideas that would be useful). People today are content to lead their sheep-like lives without even wanting to know what lies beyond the occult horizon, or what truly lurks in the shadows of the night. They are welcome to their flaccidity, for there must always be sheep to feed the wolves, after all. As for the reasons for my existence, let's just say that some people might be surprised or even horrified if they knew."

Nevertheless, there are still people out there who would

question the band's reliance on nostalgic themes, perhaps even branding it as escapist and unhealthy.

"I certainly wouldn't call our work reactionary or romantic", Byron counters. "Much of the output of **Bal-Sagoth** does deal with the possibilities for the future, and possible paths which could lead to the realisation of that future, however imperfect or dystopian a future it would inevitably seem to most. Science fiction is a firm staple of our lyrical output, and will continue to be in subsequent work. At any rate, I do not think it is

unhealthy to look backwards. That which has gone before is of undeniable relevance to the present and to the future. Lessons learned from the past always be applied to the here and now if we are to survive. The wisdom and accomplishments of our ancestors should and must be studied in greater detail and applied to the present, for in the past lies the seeds of what will one day blossom in the future, for good or ill. If mankind allowed himself to embrace more of erudite knowledge learned long ago, and took more heed of the lessons which history has taught us, then the world might, just might, be a more tolerable place. Failure to cast a glance backwards across the years



would certainly result in a stagnant and aimless society, a world devoid of purpose and identity, for the deeds of the past are essential social and psychological references for any culture which hopes to progress and thrive. Escapism isn't about refusing to face life's problem. It's about exercising the human mind in ways which will make it more proficient at dealing with them. And those people who despise escapism are soulless, mindless automata devoid of that vital spark of passion essential to the human spirit."

With the vast numbers of natural metaphors scattered around his lyrics, it's not a huge surprise that Byron is a fan of the "Mother Earth strikes back" ideology. Isn't it all a bit silly?
 "Those who scoff at this idea will be forced to eat their words when our Great Mother finally tires of the endless abuse which her children are dealing her. Mankind has risen to supremacy of the planet phenomenally quickly, and has only been here a brief few seconds in the cosmic scheme of things. Great sentient forces beyond our feeble comprehension exist at large in the universe, and mankind ignores these forces at its peril. May the gods have pity on our arrogant folly."

Ride them Down!

It's no surprise to hear that if Byron went into past-life regress, he'd expect to discover his previous incarnations as mighty and fearsome warriors. On a more serious note, I also asked him if there was a military streak in his earthly bloodline:
 "Yes indeed," he agrees, "I believe that I have stood upon countless battlefields over the aeons, bloodied blade in hand. smitten corpses at my feet! And yes, my clan has a military history, including a significant naval heritage. Via the dreamscape, I often revisit those past times, and converse with long dead ancestors and spirits. Some may think me mad, but I assure you I am utterly sane."

It's not surprising that Byron wants to live fully bathed in the **Bal-Sagoth** concept. He points out that, for him, the background to a band's creation is more than important:

"If I was reading an interview with a band I was interested in, I would certainly want to know about that band's concept just as much as the music. Music is after all an exercise in passion and the conceptual, it is art, not a piece of machinery. People who only want to know about the "nuts and bolts" of something, so to speak, are essentially shallow and too linear-minded. There must be and is, a finely balanced interest between how music is produced by artists, and what it is that possessed them to craft it."

The last words belong to Byron:

"For the future, people can expect wonderful things from **Bal-Sagoth**. Our fourth album is currently being written, and we are infusing it with incredible potency and unrivalled depth and passion. With each album, we get better at what we do, our skills become more finely honed and developed, and we are able to create work ever closer to that illusive notion of perfection which exists in the minds of all artists. Expect the keyboards to transport you to dizzying new heights of bombastic splendour, the lyrics to open new doors to shadow-haunted vistas of erudite lunacy and con-veiled secrets, and once again, expect **Bal-Sagoth** to take you on an epic journey into realms where dark avant-garde art rules supreme. What more could anyone possibly ask for from a band?"

27, MAIN ROAD, USHER WOOD, WHARNCLIFFE SIDE, SHEFFIELD, S. YORKS S35 3DP, ENGLAND

Simplicity is often the most effective policy, musically speaking. Take one-man-band **Falkenbach** as an example. On paper, the album *...Magni Blandinn Ok Megintiri...* is unremarkable; basic drum machine patterns, a synth, rhythm guitar and the lungs of one Vratyas Vakyas. In practice, it all works wonderfully, despite the fact that the songs are flogged a little past their natural conclusions. It's picture music par excellence that relies on uncomplicated, but striking songwriting. The man behind it all told me about the switch from No Colours (through which the debut was released) to Napalm for the second album:

"Before I signed to No Colours for the debut album I've had quite a few other offers too, for example from Osmose. I decided to sign to No Colours though I knew about the fact not every of my wishes would be satisfied 100%.

All in all No Colours did a good job, but for the second album some aspects should have been improved. First it seemed as this was possible, so there was no reason for me to change the label. The closer the recording came, the more it became obvious that stagnation would take place, so the only way to avoid this was to change in the end."

Interestingly, Vratyas goes on to detail his contractual particulars.

"The new contract I got from No Colours did give me a royalty of exactly 1.50DM per CD, and that's nearly the same I earn on Napalm now (1.65DM), so my royalty wasn't the reason and didn't play a too important role."

No Colours have some bands with dubious beliefs, such as **Veles** and **Absurd**, but the man says this was not part of the reason to leave. After all, Napalm Records release **Náströnd** records with the same sort of ideology.

"I also don't have any problems with bands on No Colours, so this aspect is of no importance too. I don't want to talk about what happened back then between No Colours and me, because I think it's a personal thing between Steffen and I. He even understood why I changed the label and wasn't angry, so obviously just people without an insight can rate what happened and spread false rumours! I still

co-operate with No Colours, and we used to have a pretty good relation! You know, not everything has to do with commercial background. There were a few reasons for my decision, but even if some guys prefer to think I just wanted to earn money it's a fact this is a lie!"

Vratyas obviously is a little touchy about being labelled as having sold out. As if one could imagine an entity such as **Falkenbach** signing to a huge label.

Sing Like an Angel, Live Like a Devil

I put it to him that the songs on the second album are more epic than those on the debut.

"You know," he answers, "I don't sit down and start to create any songs with a special musical intention. If a song turns out to become more epic, it's OK. If a song turns out to become quite different, it's OK too!"

The man is quick to admit that not everything turned out smelling of roses:

"The only thing I care about is I have to like the songs, no more, no less. It's a fact this album differs from the first one, and some parts did in fact become quite monotonous, but it's also a fact I've had pretty much trouble with the drum computer this time. The sound's improved, I think the songs were really good ones too, but nevertheless I have to concede this album had more potential. Around this recording, a few weeks before and after it, I had to stand a lot of problems during my work with **Falkenbach**, and maybe it had been better to do this recording a few months later. However, as always a musician is never 100% satisfied, but this album is acceptable in my eyes. I learned from the mistakes I did last time."

Arguably the best aspect of the second album are Vratyas' wondrous, soulful vocals. The new album capitalises on the talents that were perhaps bashfully included on the debut. This time around the screaming is kept well under control. Did Vratyas have any singing instruction, seeing as this aspect of **Falkenbach** is so compelling?

"Thanks for your compliment! Well, besides the moments when I sing a **Falkenbach** song I didn't used to sing anyway, so there's no special training or something like that. And I'm sure one can hear I'm not too great a vocalist, even if my voice may fit to the music."

A modest man indeed.

En Their Medh Riki Fara

...Magni Blandinn Ok Megintiri...? Eh?

"The new title means something like, "...Mixed with Strength and Proud Glory...". Both [album] titles are quotations from the Edda, so to understand them means to know about the context. Everyone who's interested should read the Edda, so it'll be obvious."

The first album's title translates roughly as, "...And Gloriously They Shall Pass...", if you were wondering. Seeing as Vratyas has brought up the Edda, we might as well have a chinwag about the Viking thang.

The first thing that needs to be got off the chest is the little manner of one of the songs on the new album. Odinn of *Mimes Brunn* commented (a little harshly) on the similarity between said song's introduction and that of **Bathory's** "Enter the Eternal Fire". Do we find you innocent or guilty?

"So far I've heard **Falkenbach** was heavily influenced by **Dark Funeral**, by **Einherjer**, by **Emperor** and also by **Bathory**. You know, I simply stopped defending myself, because it doesn't make any



is about five years old now, if I remember right, and a few months before the second album was released **Burzum** used something not too different. Now I'm influenced by **Burzum** too, but to be honest, I don't care. Everyone is free to think whatever he or she wants, the more if it comes to subjective experiences, so what can I do? This won't lead me to change the typical style of **Falkenbach**. Whoever thinks **Falkenbach** isn't more than an **Einherjer**, **Emperor**, **Bathory** etc. rip-off simply shouldn't buy it!"

We're obviously getting nowhere fast here, so we'll simply give him the benefit of the doubt and agree that **Bathory** is nothing more than a major influence on the man.

Waning Lyrical

Vratyas is keen to point out that **Falkenbach's** music tells the whole story.

"Songs like "Asum Ok Alfum Naer" or "Baldu's Tod" don't need lyrics," he begins, "simply because they tell a story through the atmosphere conveyed by the melodies. Those songs are done to let the listener close his eyes and feel what this song is about. Songs with lyrics are a bit different, and to understand one has to read the lyrics carefully. A lot of things or persons in the lyrics are symbols, so one has to know their meaning, so if I write aren't too someone takes 'em in a superficial way, he/she won't really understand the deeper meaning."

I admit that I have never read any **Falkenbach** lyrics, for me, as Vratyas has stated, sitting back and listening to the sleigh bells of "The



Heathenish Foray" is as full an experience in its own right, needing no further explanation.

A Man of Heathen Pride

The man released a couple of tapes before he was allowed to grace the roster of No Colours, but limited the number produced. Would he ever consider bringing those songs back to life?

"I don't think it makes sense to limit a tape first, and to release it later on once more. As far as I know I could sell a few thousand CDs featuring demos of **Falkenbach**, and this would mean a lot of money to earn for me. Every song I use on CD was featured on tape too, 'cause I still do those tapes, still in the same limited way for a few persons close to me. But I don't think to release those tapes again, I don't even copy them for those who asked me to do so. I don't even have copies for myself of those tapes, except for the last tape, ...*Skinn Af Sverði Sal Valtira...*"

Reading previous interviews with Vratyas (which are few and far between), the man obviously has a huge interest in the pagan history of Northern Europe. Knowing him to be a practising heathen, I asked whether one can rely on the Edda too much, seeing as its writer was a Christian historian.

"It's a fact S. Sturlusson obviously connected traditional wisdom and (his own) Christian faith", he answers.

"But I also think it's a not too difficult task to separate the truth from his own additions. In my opinion the Edda is very important, not only seen from artistic aspects, but also knowledge-wise. People whose knowledge is based on the Edda only may misunderstand important things, but as usual these days a lot of "heathens" aren't more than "sparetime pagans", and those who're really dedicated surely have got more than just this one source of knowledge. If you separate the lies from the truth, there's no space left for any kinda interpretation in the Edda. Christianity always tried to connect those traditions to their own religion which they couldn't destroy. The last part of the Edda, when Sturlusson described what will happen after Ragnarok, obviously is a lie! Either this battle will be won or lost, the ones who'll win will rule, the ones who survived will exist, those who died will become a part of new legends and sagas. Christianity wasn't able to destroy this faith and wisdom, so it tried to let the gods and goddesses die in a myth. A typical action of betrayers and backstabbers, lies spread by weak cowards."

It is indeed obvious that Sturlusson had a hidden agenda, albeit one that didn't completely distort the Nordic sagas. The sun god Balder, however, was a figure whose death and rebirth could easily be assimilated into the belief in a reincarnated Jesus Christ.

Past interviews with Vratyas Vakyas have tended to focus on the idea of Vatan. Could the man explain exactly how that relates to the Asatru religion?

"Well, Asatru is first of all a faith. It tells the people what happened, and it tells some parts of what will happen. It's also said in the Edda that runes can be used for different reasons, but without detailed explanations. Vatan - said to be the lore of the Hyperborean culture, their own legacy to us - is based upon Asatru, but cares about different aspects. For example, if Asatru tells us this will happen, Vatan explains why and how it happens. The use of runes has a lot to do with the "law of analogy", so if the Edda tells us a rune can help you achieve something, Vatan explains which rune it is, and why this special rune can help you. It's not just said, "this rune has this special meaning, so use it in this or that way", but Vatan explains why this rune can help you, and how! This is just one single example. Vatan has a strong scientific background of physics, chemistry, etc. so to fully understand this lore one surely has to study those sciences. Vatan doesn't spread empty dogmas, but makes the Asatru faith provable! It gives you the freedom to improve and enforce your knowledge, shows and 'teaches' artistic and philosophical ways to make your existence more 'clear'. To speak in a symbolic way: Asatru and Vatan are like

To Ride, Throw the Axe Straight and Speak the Truth

Vratyas is well aware that the Viking religion and cosmology is widely used - and misused - these days. He is quick to point out that there is a difference between bands who use the imagery and those actually living the old way of life.

"This is the main point: the difference between someone who believes (or thinks to believe at least) and the one who knows! This is the difference between someone who calls himself a heathen since he listens to **Einherjer** or **Enslaved** (or to **Bathory** and **Falkenbach** as you may prefer) and the one who learned through own experiences! I don't give a shit about a stupid Satanist, nor about a stupid heathen or whatever. I don't give a shit about any stupid being who is just part of the mass, of the trend. We're close to the point when we can recognise the false ones by the fact they wear Mjöllnir 'round their necks. It's a proud symbol, but how many non-brain-humans wear one now? People say the heathen movement becomes stronger these days, but in my opinion this development is one of the most dangerous things which happened to heathendom, due to the fact it splits up to trend on one side, and a few dedicated ones on the other side. What happened to black metal in general now seems to happen with heathendom too."

His point is invalid of course, on the grounds that splitting the fakes from the faithful does not weaken any heathen movement. With the number of bands that claim to play anything close to 'Viking metal', though, you can see why Vratyas is concerned.

"I think if you don't know what you're talking or singing about, if you don't even believe in the words you spread, you can't say they support anything but false trend!" opines the musician.

"I don't want to go too far and call it blasphemy, as those guys are just using stuff they like without any too special intention. In fact they harm those who're dedicated, and who now have to stand a mass of idiots following this 'hobby' called heathendom. To them it's history, fairy-tales etc. However, I don't want to use the term "Viking metal" for **Falkenbach** anyway, due to the fact I'm no Viking (and no one else can be a "Viking" today), nor do I care about Vikings in the lyrics. Obviously I use characters, sometimes a king, sometimes a wanderer, and also a Viking etc., but that's a "cape"! Wrapped in this cape you can find a story, and this story I always use to fill up with aspects of Vatan. The Asatruian symbols like ravens, Mjöllnir etc. are obvious, the Vatanic principles are more hidden, for example in numbers or in metaphors. As **Falkenbach** is 100% a "religious" band (religious being non-political and also not too historical) I prefer the term "Asa Metal" or simply "Skaldic Art."

"Heathen pride" is a lyrical phrase oft used in **Falkenbach** tracks. Is he talking about a collective pride or a singular, individual feeling?

"I'm just able to talk about my own experiences of pride", Vratyas muses.

"This was used as a collective feeling, but I have to concede it's based on my rating of the word pride, so I can't say if other people feel something different when they're proud. The term "heathen pride" I used in fact to describe the feelings of more people, so I used it related to the heathen tradition in general like you said. But this doesn't mean just "ancient" pride, but also pride of the dedicated ones today!"

Yet to what extent does the man practise the elder traditions? Can he ride, for example? Vratyas doesn't let himself down:

"Well, of course I can ride a horse, and not too bad I think by the way! If I'm able to handle a sword, I think this can just be proved by a swordfight, can't it? It's no problem to hit a little tree ten times in a row, 'cause trees aren't too pugnacious enemies (the same goes for all motionless things like sandbags, dummies etc.). However, to be honest I think I can handle sword and shield, but due to the fact it's impossible nowadays to get a real good "training" I think my ability is not good enough by far. Furthermore I don't have my own horse, so I'm not allowed to ride with sword and shield. I think I can throw the axe quite well, and I'm also able to use a bow and arrow. But all in all I know I've to improve my abilities quite a lot. I do my best, but it's quite hard to do so nowadays, isn't it?!"

Vratyas Vakyas concludes proceedings, somewhat surprisingly indicating that the primary motivation for his project is not musical:

"**Falkenbach** was created as a religious thing, not to make people have a good time while listening to the music. I try to achieve something with the work I do, and my goals aren't commercial ones, but pretty idealistic I think. Everything has got two sides, a good one and a rather bad one. The good thing is it seems **Falkenbach** was able to bring a few dedicated persons more close to each other and to connect some beings to the fraternity. The bad thing is 99% of all those who bought an album of **Falkenbach** aren't even interested in its real meaning, in its message. I've got no problem with those who just want to enjoy the music, that's clear, but it's simply not my intention to do **Falkenbach** for fun."

Take or leave the religious aspect - and many will indeed choose the latter - the fact is that Vratyas' music is entertaining. I'll have a good time listening to his heathen tunes, whether he likes it or not.

VRYATYAS VAKYAS, ROSMARINSTR. 30B, 40235 DÜSSELDORF, GERMANY.



Who?

Never heard of them? But this bunch of Lithuanians have even been interviewed by *Kerrang!* and featured on the latest *Godreah* compilation, so they must be good, right? As bandmember Vaidas Sadeika was in the country over the summer, I decided it was time to let him have a say. Hopefully I might even beat *Kerrang!* at it!

Vaidas is a fascinating character, but his written English is a little ropey. I have tried to leave it as best I can whilst making sure that the man's ideas shine through.

The band has recently released a debut on the UK's Neat Metal, so I asked him how they were picked up and whether their album had been gracefully received. It's called *Pabudimas*, isn't it?

"Exactly, *Pabudimas* is the title of the promo and the debut CD", Vaidas begins. "I sent the tape to Deórth of **Ragnarok** (UK), with whom we were contacting for a while, he really liked the music and passed it to those guys at Neat Metal. They enjoyed it too and so we got a contract. We didn't send lots of tapes to labels, just to a few. There were just first weeks after release when Deórth got it, so we're lucky enough as you see. General response was very positive, when I got copies of reviews *Pabudimas* got in magazines, I can say I'm truly amazed. Moreover, these days of burning with ideas that had been put in *Pabudimas* seems so remote now that it's even strange how people do like it, when I myself do not."

Oh, it's like that, is it? Dissatisfied already. What does Vaidas feel the main aim of communicating **Ha Lela**'s ideas to the general public was at the time?

"It was intended to be proud, border-pushing ("Awakening"), head-smashing, soul-cleaning, making Satan & co. laugh, children-shocking, parent-shoulder-shrugging, ancient gods-awakening, so "strength and joy". There were live performances when I stood straight like a wooden stick and shouted my words of awakening and public's mosh was calming down, their eyes stabbing into a motionless silhouette."

The real gem of the promo tape was the song 'Isjoja Bernelis' ('The Darling Rides Out'), with its frenetic pace and beguiling folkiness.

"'Isjoja Bernelis' is featured on the CD version," Vaidas points out, "like all other songs from the promo (that was our goal - to release that opus fully on the CD) but in a bit different version, let's say more mature and polished. The keyboard's track is different, vocals also a bit different, and it's all faster, with more energy thrown in. Did you hear *Pabudimas*? You would be a better expert than me on that subject. As I understand there is some difference between older and newer songs, but the main idea is kept accurately, I guess."

What was the idea with the cover of the tape, it's some kind of a depiction of Lithuanian folk-history I believe?

"Sadly, I have not the actual cover before my eyes, but I'll try to fuck up my memory store. The main figure is an old man with the hammer in his hands riding the horses; that's Perkūnas, Lithuanian god of thunder, lightning, truthfulness, much like the Germanic Wotan, and Norse Thor with his Mjöllnir. He's one of the Baltic gods' trinity, the other two being Pykoulis (Pocculus) - god of the underworld, pale old man, damn angry I guess, and Patrimpas - god of spring, fertility etc. He's shown as a young male with a wheat wreath on his head. I don't know why, but Perkūnas is regarded as the most important of the trinity, perhaps just academic researchers, who seldomly go for invocation, put it on top of the pantheon. In the middle of the place, which is a sanctuary according to its look, is the altar, with eternal fire burning within. And finally, old, long-haired, white-bearded man handling strange, a bit similar to harp, musical instrument, is the wizard playing 'kankles' (6,8,12,24,36-stringed instrument), the same 'kankles' you hear in between "normal" songs."

So, that is what's behind the strange ethnic tinkling on the tape, it sounds rather like a deranged mandolin.

What makes Lithuanian folk-history so special for you, Vaidas? "To explain Lithuanian folk-history would mean to fall into suspicions, fantasies, interpretations and misinterpretations; there would be hardly a grain of truth. So I keep silent. You know, mythology is an all-time functioning system, whirling and swaying - everyone interested should read a book and take living research - visions, dance, gods' appearance and disappearance. There have not been found any written documents on Lithuanian folk history, academics took something from Scandinavia, something from Greece, put Baltic gods into different suits and situations. For example, Pykoulis caught his wife Nijole, according to books much alike Hades got his own Persephone; stealing her by the river. There are lots of songs and fairytales left and people who study them hard enough come to most unbelievable and not conclusions."

Vaidas explains that it's not your everyday mythology that inspired the music and lyrics of **Ha Lela**. I later asked him whether it's necessary to dig up the spiritual past in order to proceed into the future.

"Generally", Vaidas says, "there is no folk history expressed in *Pabudimas*, just fragments of what I was into in that period; "pagan" symbols, hints to Ariosophy (in the first song, the North Star represents Thule, a shapeless island) and most

Ha Lela

importantly, breaking of the old veils, release from the wicked circle. I think that a strong and vibrating base is always needed in order to jump further, what you refer to as "spiritual past" is not necessarily "past", it depends on what time theory you rely on. As you may know, Germans don't have a linear time structure, *Urda* represents something like *Wyrd* ("doom"), then *Verdandi* (eternal moment of "now"), both are in constant friction from which derive steps of *Skuld* (future). So proper knowledge of what you already are can serve as a guide through the "dark nights of the soul". Then you can check quantum time, T. McKenna's "zero time", but in case you have no reasonable bottom, most probably you'll get lost."

Oedipal Complex

Musically speaking, **Ha Lela**'s style mixes bright, optimistic mood with a sense of danger and foreboding. Am I way off track here, Mr Sadeika? Does the man shy from a total feeling of depression and negativity in music, such that many musicians espouse?

"I agree with all your descriptions, for I have not any of my own. Negativity played in the music may be just 'cause of stupidity in their heads, bad education, difficult childhood and babyhood, when most of restrictions, taboos are being infused, Oedipus/Elektra complex, no experience of T. Leary's "fifth circuit trance" induced by light drugs or just simple breathing exercises when all problems, worries about food dissolve in autoerotic playfulness."

Psychoanalysis has never been one of my fortes. Vaidas goes on to ask:

"Have you ever heard of **Helloween**, **Judas Priest**, **Manowar**, finally **Venom** - is their music not played in a happy manner? For me, it's "happy". Then nowadays **Gebennah** with its alcoholic, disco-assholes-beating lyrics? Music hardly could be put in any frame, unless it is really bad (like most black metal bands), am I the first one who says that?"

Thankfully not. **Ha Lela** obviously don't hide behind pentagrams, but what's the symbol on the back cover of the promo tape; it says, "Vetso Menesio Vaizbuva".

"That's the emblem of the small Lithuanian label which helped us to shoot out the tape," he explains, "but their collaborations happened to appear dishonest for me, so we parted. "Cyclops figure", according to their explanation is something like a "one-eyed man who guards all dark arts" - a kind of Odin, if such can be. "Vetso Menesio Vaizbuva" is the name of that label and means literally "Guardship of the Vanished Moon"."

I had the feeling that it was something more important than, but anyway. Doesn't Vaidas think the wadlike lyrics of *Pabudimas* are a little overdone in this scene of ours?

"You can call it clichéd as well as bleached, but I can't change anything now. It's put in stone, I can't erase it. How can one describe battle for example without the use of warlike imagery? Of course one can - swords, axes, sweat, screams, for one associated with birth-giving act - new baby's screams, mother's screams, blood, sweat, saliva, perhaps a knife - so I put it as it was. It can be taken as means for ritualistic frenzy-inducing as well, there are hells of ways of reading/listening poetry."

Vaidas is slightly bemused when I mention that the Lithuanian language sounds remarkably effective in the context of **Ha Lela**.

"I have no problems with the Lithuanian language," he says, "it sounds as it should for me - my native language, neither harsh nor mild. I agree with you that it's phonetically harsh in comparison with English; there are many more consonants, just to mention "r" which in most parts of England is invisible, thus in Lithuania it is pronounced clearly. I think German should sound totally harsh for you, no?"

That's the thing though, German isn't a particularly beautiful language, and from the singing on *Pabudimas*, Lithuanian seems to flow a lot easier off the tongue. It's softer, with fewer stopped consonants and it really works a whole lot better as a sung language.

"From my personal experience," Vaidas reveals, "some English people mistook me for a German; one Englishman who told me works as a German language teacher in a school, said, "You speak English much like Germans do" - no, I'm Lithuanian."

I hope the man wasn't offended. Will **Ha Lela** sell their little black souls into singing in English in the future?

"I doubt that such will happen, 'cause from my personal experience again, most times I speak English, unless I speak for an entire evening or so, I have no real feeling of

the language. It functions mostly on translation's base, like my thoughts appear in Lithuanian and quickly someone translates them into English. One must spend at least half a year here in England in order to speak properly. I could quote easily your thoughts in English like I'm doing now, but I prefer singing in Lithuanian, so excuse me ladies and gentlemen."

In my review I drew a comparison between Vaidas' lot and the earlier releases of a certain Czech band.

"As I told above," he responds, "I agree with every description of **Ha Lela's** style. Indeed, I'm quite astonished when you mention **Master's Hammer**, I hear it a second time. The first one occurred in *Aardschok* mag, but I could not say that influences need to be conscious (as there is probably with all our thinking process, it just happens and no one can really describe how it happened). **Master's Hammer** was kind of my favourite band when I was 16-18 and especially their vocalist with his harsh yet melodic singing, so everything can go out for the sun. Musically I can't speak, 'cause I didn't create any riffs. You should ask Ramunas or Lauras who are responsible for them."

At War with Uncle Sam

Vaidas stated in *AEON* magazine that the American way of life on Lithuania is stronger than in any West European country. Surely England, with the parity of language is far more fully Americanised? I seem to have misunderstood what he was meaning here:

"Many things have been said concerning that. If my remembrance does not cheat me, I wrote: "influence of American way...", so then it gets a little different flavour. What I can tell you after staying in England for two months, is that it is nonsense to speak about the influence of the American way of life in England since in my eyes it's fully 'Amerikkkanised', so as you put it the problem may be greater, whereas Lithuania is under influence. I guess you would find people who do not know what a giant McDonald's is, or if you would say to the average Lithuanian that the average American left in Lithuanian forest would die in three days (of course I'm joking, for death does not kiss so easily) s/he would just shrug and make his/her mouth terribly open. Though I'm doubtful that Lithuania has any real influence over Eastern Europe. It did not break from the USSR alone, all that imperium has fallen into pieces, just look at the map." Does Vaidas see the rise of an Orwellian 'Europa' as necessary in order to counter the boundless influence of the United States?

"One should take an astonishingly large cleaning action in order to put at least half of all Europeans on their roots again," he replies, "just then Orwellian Europa could begin to change things slowly, but that's not the case I guess. There exist conspiracy theories, "atlanteans" (Americans, NATO) versus "continentals" (Europa, Asia) and as far as my acquaintance with Russian "elitists" (as they regard themselves) the press allows to speak, I can figure that the two real fighters are just Russia and America. Russia is a real power for sure, as well as America. Is it not strange that Russians, which seems can go out of economic crisis still carries intensive military investigations, Russian scientists are the ones who counts for ever? Where Americans just put their fingers - Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Pakistan (the latest news about American and English bombs there), Russians put theirs against them. Conflict solutions would appear too hard, too hot to carry out for most Europeans and most Americans. Generally, I do not care, "imperias cannot last where ideas of blood and soil are staggered and fall apart". "If you search for Europa, just look at your heart" - the words of T. Wakeford just ask to be repeated."

The general attitude of said magazine was anti-American, but evidently Vaidas feels it is foolhardy to blacklist a whole culture in such a way.

"How many of those "AEON mentality-holding" ones have been in America?" he questions. "Personally I haven't. I don't know. To make at least hypothetically correct comparisons one should spend more than two years in America, so I hit my head for the previous answer. America is diverse, as diverse as Europe, full of sub-cultures of which one's being just glummy new age, whereas others are really pushing you to think. Just read interviews of **6LOD**, the American Detroit-based industrial band. They represent America too - living in a city where crime is high, again I'm just re-telling what has been told, themselves being ones who could be brought in prison, appearing and disappearing in the form of a black leather and iron-suited gang, but they managed to catch a meaning out of that - just as I understand. It's a question of "you or other", being constantly vigilant like in a primate jungle and in such a way one can truly discover their own borders and restrictions. How many *AEON* mentality-holders have been stuck in real danger? I'm not bragging that I'm in such difficult conditions, these could be counted on one hand's fingers, but then I don't refer to myself as the main *AEON* magazine prop. "Church of final judgement", C. Manson, '60s LSD revolution - only a few, but far too large events to squeeze in a few pages. I don't know if I answered your question directly, but I suppose there is something in the target. I mean, there are lots of interesting things happening in America, they are neither bad nor good, just happening. Anyway, democracy is just a food for fools, you may figure fantastically good, even ingenious idea, but you have to watch properly - are there any points where it burdens the interests of other people and state? Could I wake up in jail after I jump out of the 30th floor onto a red, glittering Mercedes which is left out in the street? So, it's already reduction which you should count, trying to show your ingenuity. There is a logogram brought to your brains through TV, radio and other media channels, which allows you just to react in small frame. So the first step is to clear how it functions, then just safely detonate it, and make it harmless. And then "hobble yourself, and you'll be free."

It's at times like these when the language barrier rears its ugly head. Let's try something else from that *AEON* interview: what the hell did Vaidas mean when he defined a strong individual as a snake with a lion's head? Was this deliberately intended to be ambiguous?

"I have had no intentions to be "cryptic", "mysterious" or whatever

else. I only used metaphors, which I guess fit my criteria for "strong individual" at that time. And again, I suppose we have not avoided "noise" - I thought I wrote "lion with a snake's head".

Oops.

"If you have read something about the lion's behaviour," Vaidas continues, "then you must possess knowledge - that the "king of the beasts" is a fuckin' lazy bastard, but then I found it "wisdom-full" 'cause those strong muscles serve just in moments of real hunger or danger then the lion can run for a hundred miles searching for a victim, but when his stomach gets full, he just goes for a rest. He doesn't eat too much nor does work too much, all its actions are triggered off by natural needs. Most humans are unable to break from the work-work-work-eat-eat routine. Many people here in England with whom I have spoken said that they really hate their job; "Oh, no one likes to work", but then how many attempted not to go to their offices, garages etc? From my own experience, £40 are darn enough for a week's food, if you're renting a room you have to pay extra £50 or £60, whereas those unhappy workers get £300 per week and still are dissatisfied. "Enough" for humans means "too much" (W. Blake) or just listen to the German Eulenspiegel; "eat what you have, fast when you must". You may ask then why I work thirteen hours per day here - that after three months of hard work I could seek pleasures in a period of one or even two years."

He's not going to be popular with the trade unions, this Sadeika fellow. Vaidas continues:

"Then, "snake's head" - it stands for opposites, thoughtfulness - although no one knows what thoughts breed in that small skull - the snake is regarded to be a very witty creature. And what appeals for me most is the serpent's ability for renewal, for taking off its old skin and growing a new one. So, a strange hybrid - lion with snake's head."

Finally, in my scavenging of details from other underground magazines, the man has expressed concern in the past that today's women are anxious to surpass men in any way possible. Is it cowardly to ordain a particular role for either sex, and what are Vaidas' views on contemporary feminism?

"Hell no, I'm not ordaining particular roles, just when something changes you always take notice of it, and most times cannot get rid of various values and criteria. In my eyes, women are really trying to surpass men in particular areas and feminism is helping them to do that, I guess. I don't know much about the "aims and achievements of feminism" - as I understand it's just a primal goal and the ultimate one would be to create a kind of Amazonian republic, where men would serve just for pregnancy's purposes, for giving birth to new girls, whereas most of boys would be simply thrown out. Usually feminism, sexism and other "isms" don't appeal for me, so fuck off. Some months ago I read *Sex and Violence* by Camille Paglia, the American thinker and she solves the problem easily - "that's men who allow me to sit at home and write this". Though in some occasions her thoughts may appear to be female-priority-advocating nevertheless she does not stop solely on that. The main stones of her philosophy; female equals nature, fullness, fertility, sensitivity; male equals not-fullness, constant struggle to release himself, reasoning, terror against wet indeterminacy of the vagina, art as means of protest against chaos though springing from the same chaos. She notes the fact that in all high-class civilisations - Roman, Greek, Egypt, where thrived arts and science, equally prospered homosexuality - men deprived of females' couches thus from their own fear of indifference or rather they change the way of releasing that fear - art with its colours, straight and curved lines substitutes for women's kisses and embraces. If it caught your attention just check out that book from the '60s Penguin Classics and find more. "Looking for the Sun"."

Love under Will

Vaidas is a practising occultist. In a scene which once constituted would-be magickians falling over themselves to prove their dedication to the subject, the man has a lot to say: "Magick is practise, unless you are big-eared academic wanting future generations to remember you as a great scholar who picked up the greatest amount of facts. "Practical" means that you go for meditation (active or passive), chanting, dancing, shouting, sweating, carving strange sigils in the piece wood and colouring them with your own blood and sperm, or just drawing them on your own skin and shake yourself until the shape is being washed away by your faeces, fasting, telling yourself to be aware of events around and inside you, painting, just sitting, telling yourself that for the next two months you'll keep the spoon in your left hand, read books just sitting in the hard chair with back straight and legs being put together, not saying the word "and", "a" or "I", not eating chocolate, chips and meat for a period of two months, not watching TV and not listening to your favourite, lovely music, but doing muscle training exercises instead, smoke or not smoke etc. There is no single system which would fit for all - one needs to breathe for ten minutes until his body fully releases from strain, whereas another has to do the same for thirty minutes to get the same effect. So the "will" goes first and then the "results" and "how", unless you're a brainless staff sounding as they're told, and not attempting to add anything of your own or simply going for their personal doctor's advice or remedy. Magick needs both discipline and relaxation as hard wood needs calm weather and storm."

The reference to the willpower exercises is of course from Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practise*. He had the following to say when I asked him where he found the strength of will needed to effect self-development:

"I don't know whether I'm either naturally ambitious or have had to work on a lot - I will just tell how it happens for me - there are months when I do my practises daily and regularly, and there are months, weeks or days when I give up on them and then start again, there is no return. The body is like a store keeping all achievements and failures, it knows well what it needs - work or repose, sex or abstinence, one just has to learn to understand its impulses and urges. Go for the fear if you're afraid of something, you can develop an overwhelming urge for adrenaline, which won't allow you to sit for sure, or just hit your head against a wall - "I am here not to teach you, but kill you." Does Vaidas believe that contemporary magick will eventually be absorbed into scientific theory?

"I guess it's all happening - science, how undetermined, quantum it would be, attempts to absorb everything. You'll see where new heretics from magick, politics, economics etc. will arrive. I can't prognose anything - will Satan be fully absorbed by cyberGod, who thinks that I know anything? Some magicians have built their systems on a scientific basis, whereas others work successfully with a fictional base. Honestly, I'm interested in achievements both in science and magick. Such grand "scholars" as D. Bohm, Wallace, seem fully to operate with terms which were attributed to "mystics" - parallel worlds, light holes, wholeness. However, science was ever ready to explain and it is still the same, they want to explain how parallel worlds are created, how tachyons behave creating them, what they are doing when their speed (which is regarded to be greater than light speed) slows nearly to light speed, whereas magick is first to observe."

Audrius from **Poccolus** is another one from Lithuania who's into occultism. I conjectured that the country seems a mine of occult activity, but Vaidas isn't so sure:

"I do not see any of Lithuania's priority advance in "occult" field against any other East or West world country", he says. "As I remember, Audrius mentioned mostly bands from our home town so one can make really fantastic conclusions - generally there are five people and ten projects - **Sala, Ha Lela, Poccolus, Zpoan Utens, Sovijus** - and one man who features in all of them, so he is really a shapeless, billion-selved 'Alzheimerabruptum'. This orientation to the "occult", hocus-pocus, appears in the entire black metal underground so for that reason it should be drowned in the shit. Low-key countries are just less overwhelmed by commercialism and that's all, that may be cause for bigger interest in spirituality indeed."

The old Norsecore school of occultism never got very far, did it? Mr Sadeika is scathing in his criticism.

"Ask **Troll, Ulver, and Arcturus** how many times they did see Odin, how many times they have just sat and gazed, and you'll know. All those pentagrams, inverted crosses and goat's horns should be put into their nice asses."

Disco 2000

Ha Lela are pushing at the folkly end of extreme music. What is the Sadeika opinion on forms and genres of music not so close to our beloved metal?

"I like some to the extent, indeed, but then I prefer to dance, to shake, to make something strange happen. I do like DJs, crazy DJs such were in Prague's *Roxy* - in the middle of the night you can't notice any sound, it's music inside and outside you. Usually, when I go in for the dance party (that does not happen so often), I prepare any sigil to be energised by the energy which goes out of myself."

He continues: "I don't regard myself as a "composer of black metal", nor "composer of any other music", and I don't know how many blackos like techno. Personally, I did not notice any **Burzum** T-shirts in such clubs and parties."

Now that's a surprise.

"The human's ear channels has rhythm patterns as well as the optic nerve has figure patterns (they are called phosphors or fosphens or phosfens, I don't know), so releasing that one can male the strangest things happen. Z'ev has explained many of rhythm's functions; he prepared tables of rhythms (I know that 2-3-3 is for "receptiveness") beating which one can cause various effects - fear, death, joy, success etc. I'm not keen on the subject, you should ask Audrius (**Poccolus**), who did damn good research. "We dance for ecstasy, not because we've got ecstasy.""

At the end of the day **Ha Lela** are just another obscure band from a small country on an obscure label. So, let's finish by asking Vaidas why readers should risk their cash on a **Ha Lela** record.

"Obscure band on an obscure label? Neat Metal did release **Venom** back in the '80s, is that not enough? Readers should send \$18 to Neat Metal/Eldethom to obtain **Ha Lela's** CD. Also they should send various gifts to me - womens' socks, leather gloves, tongues consecrated in sperm, books of A.O.Spare (especially his drawings), books published by Mandrake of Oxford, star's pieces, nuclear weapons. Also book of my lectures on "virtual brain's consumption" can be obtained by sending £10 or \$15 to my address:

HA LELA, TAIKOS 10-11, 4910 UTENA, LITHUANIA.

solefald

Black metal with red edges? Red metal with black edges? Don't ask me about that, and don't even think about telling me that Solefald aren't one of the most interesting propositions around nowadays. Would they have surfaced without the black metal explosion? Are we getting too arty and leaving Planet Metal entirely? Why the Naomi Campbell picture? Let's turn to Cornelius and attempt to find out. The man explains that he has dropped the "Bastard" bit from his name:

"My rearranged family name suited me at the time, but has now signed off the job due to personal matters. The humour seems to be needed somewhere else."

Making anagrams from his own names is just not funny anymore it seems. Neither is my suggestion of adopting a more stereotypical black metal pseudonym.

"A vocabulary that merely consists of Tolkien and the Scriptures is not my vocabulary", he states curtly.

These guys aren't content to trot out the old catchphrases again and again, and not only in the image department. The chance for Solefald to grab their own patch in the decaying post-Euroonym scene seems to have come from an embryonic stage in the band's history.

"At the time we started playing, there were no bands around that could fill the gap we saw in the scene", Cornelius explains. "From the reactions we first got from friends, we understood that we had hit a nerve in Dracula's tooth. We did have certain doubts about whether we should use the more acid-jazz orientated riffs, but we chose in favour of our own artistic intuition, instead of some abstract prejudice we thought may be offended by our sound."

It wasn't easy being different though, was it? "Our starting position was a very lonely one that demanded power through expression", he continues. "As a performance artist said; 'In New York, you're always surrounded and always alone.'" This inevitable fact explains a lot about our music."

It would also explain why, when interrogated for a certain Finnish fanzine, we were told that Solefald's music has something to do with "the outcry of a soul trapped in all the urban stagnation, desperation and pressure". Not to mention "the all-consuming loneliness of the modern individual". Cornelius realises that the modern capitalistic way of living is inescapable: "If you want to be heard, you'll have to scream or seduce. The general competition works well, as there are not any alternatives available at the present as far as I can see. But the Darwinian society has its price. From a philosophical point of view, what we do with Solefald is capitalistic, as we turn negative states into a positive production."

Still, the man believes that there must, at some point, be a compromise. Can one really shun everyone and everything else in total immodesty?

"The 'no-modesty' creed should be for me a thing of the past. To me, caring about others is the true sign of any prosperity."

Obviously, we're deviating from official black metal policy.

"Still," Cornelius goes on to say, "ambitions pay off; the piano legend Neuhaus expressed it this way:

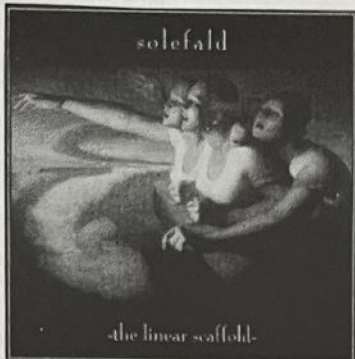
"I always demand 100% from my students and their interpretation of the works. Still, without having sacrificed the integrity of the composer, I'm happy when they've achieved 20%."

"A memento mori maybe what makes art so dangerous, untouched by compromise. Anyone on top of the hierarchy should be quite lonely. It depends whether or not you like the companionship of others." The fact that so many 'misanthropic' black metal bands were and are so busy copying each other obviously shows that they find comfort and friendship in their mediocrity.

Surreal Stormtrooping

The question of whether or not Solefald are avantgarde may be down to semantics. Being before one's time implies that one's current style will grow increasingly popular in future, does it not?

"I don't mind being classified as avantgarde. In the future and at the present we're paying less attention to our surroundings than before, and we're both extremely satisfied with where our music is heading, and we're both extremely segregated from the rest of the culture is an A band that lives segregated from the rest of the culture is an uninteresting band. For example, early *Darkthrone* (*A Blaze in the Northern Sky*) was for me a counter-reaction to the materialistic spirit inherent in society. One has to take the precautions of both challenging the listener as well as exploring the creative self. As for your definition of avantgarde: the first storm-troopers may well die on



their way, but they leave the terrain safe and open..."

Indeed. And the cover painting decorating *The Linear Scaffold* nods both to contemporary art and to the band's own "origination, accomplishment, bereavement" cycle, which also implies an element of reincarnation, the serpent biting its tail as it were. Existence without end.

"The return of the sun" fits the cyclical foundation of the Solefald philosophy perfectly (Wow! Did I say philosophy?). Oh dear, but more of this in a moment. For now, let's allow the man to finish speaking.

"My life is a linear scaffold, still part of a larger cycle. I don't believe in the idea of reincarnation as the traditionals do, more in the sense that when a human being dissolves, its particles spread and rejoin later on. If the concentration is dense, maybe one can trace some old personality."

Our atoms are indeed recyclable. But, returning to the artwork, who's this Nedrum fellow, Cornelius?

"Mr. Nedrum is a contemporary artist who depicts a retreat from civilisation, for example painting half-naked people with wolf-hides and machine guns, guarding a waterhole. He recently created a furor in Norway, with the help of a 1.5 x 1.5m self-portrait showing his hard-on. The Surrealist movement has given me a lot of input, as well as futurism."

Discussion and Dialectics

The song "Philosophical revolt" is an appraisal of philosophy, with its litany of; "Confucius, Lao Tse, Socrates, Plato, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche". How should we view this subject? We are told this discipline should be thought of in its most basic form. "To me, philosophy represents an invaluable mode of thinking, namely that of discussion and dialectics. Before you dive from the top of a cliff, you can think like this: (a) I hit the water, on the back; or (b) I hit the water on my stomach; or finally (c) I hit the water, head first.

Can you, through meditation and reflection, choose the option that suits you best?"

Of course one must remember, before one jumps to the answer (c), that it would depend on the circumstances.

If I was a masochist, option (a) would probably be the logical choice. The man has highlighted though, that the love of thinking is something that is very much lacking in today's television culture, and that it should not be thought of as something as removed as the stuff which the singer from *Moonspell* thinks he can impress everyone with.

"Philosophy can improve your everyday life", concludes the man, his mouth no doubt twisting into a smile.

Lazare stated in *Terrorizer* something about the channelling of emotions not so long ago, something I didn't really catch. Cornelius here seems a bit baffled too:

"Both pleasure and pleasantry are indeed channelled, at least between the musicians, I admit it's not very audible. But as we go for a total expression, every kind of sentiment is welcome, as long as it has something to offer."

In that same *Terrorizer* interview, Lazare stated that the song "Tequila Sunrise" was an erotic poem filtered through the medium of alcohol. However, our Cornelius doesn't want to take this aspect too far.

"Erotica and metal is a laugh. *Mötley Crüe* poetry!", he chuckles. "Seriously, it doesn't have to be always pathetic and with no sense of style. Certain modes of metal go hand in hand with Anais Non, for example *Cradle of Filth*, at times."

Yes, at times I'd certainly agree with you, although the romantic elements often would benefit from being untangled from the sexual threads in that case.

Red View Burning

What criteria are used when deciding which themes Solefald should use and which drop, musically speaking?

"The way to decide which themes to use and which to trash is for me pure intuition, a sense of equilibrium if you like. We're basically influenced by numerous genres, but the names from

each genre can be counted on one hand. Omniscience is unfortunately out of reach. To narrow each genre can be very fruitful; to listen to ten albums from five genres instead of enjoying the monotony of ten heavy metal albums. Lately, punk has settled on my CD-player, *Sex Pistols* possess an aggression still not exploited in black metal. Also hip-hop grooves in my house."

Again, a man who recognises, correctly, that open-mindedness is the key. Cornelius and Lazare have displayed enthusiasm for live performances, in the form of "musical theatre". Not the first to have suggested the idea, but isn't it all a bit unlikely, *Fleurety* never got their live ballet dancer did they? Surely a video is a more likely option?

"To a certain extent. We'd probably be better off with a widescreen on the stage displaying some performance art, television cuts, *Twin Peaks* landscapes etc. As we're now going to tour with *Haggard* and *Tristania*, we'll be the opening act, thus we'll primarily focus on playing tightly. In the future, with a bigger budget, it might be possible."

With the music possessing that descriptive quality, the Ennio Morricone comparison brought up in *Isten* magazine by Cornelius prompts me to ask about the filmscore influence to their sound. What possible film could Solefald accompany? Are they really more Morricone than John Williams?

"I don't know John Williams' scores, I must check him out. Morricone displays a supreme feeling of loneliness and good-humoured irony that totally pleases me. Should we do a soundtrack to a film, it would've been a film like *A Clockwork Orange* or *Full Metal Jacket*, a film that is seen from the perspective of a mind undisturbed by the war around it."

Miss Campbell Meets the Marlboro Man

"Living and cultivating life in all its splendour and misery". Another statement gleaned from the pages of *Isten*. For the formidable double act of Cornelius and Lazare, does their band help them live up to the ideology? An acceptance that suffering is unavoidable, is that what Cornelius would subscribe to?

"The originators of Solefald regard composing as a mode of organising interior mess, of negating the negative, to speak in Hegelian terms. I don't want to fall off the train in the middle of Satanian, and surrender my analysis to mere approval, as seems to be the case in many metal minds. Misery must be overcome, not seen as a sort of absolute, as a reflection of human nature. Personally, I know that evil arises from ignorance, and that total change is to be found below every bed on this planet."

Mike Judge said that the inspiration behind the creation of *Beavis and Butt-head* came from watching teenagers in shopping malls, looking so very tough in *Megadeth* T-shirts, being accompanied by their mothers to have their braces tightened. Cornelius though, is adamant that metal can be more than boozing, growing your hair long and being kicked out of school, as was obvious when I put it to him that metal was essentially all aggression and youthful inarticulacy.

"No, I disagree. "The youthful inarticulacy" à la *Beavis and Butt-head* will always claim that metal is non-political etc. Still, on every album in your collection (maybe even the dance stuff) there is a hidden policy. I believe that to make oneself heard among the people that one wants to talk to, clarity and precision cannot be underestimated. The music itself is nonetheless inspired by the metallic tradition, but some of our lyrics aim at actually saying, or maybe better, hinting at something. Obscure connections infiltrated by thought and subsequent verbosity."

Finally then, will Solefald be the forgotten enterprise of two "countryside bohemians", or can you make a mark in the annals of extreme music? The last words go to Cornelius, and bring me round to the recognition that the future is utterly theirs:

"To conclude this vibrant interview, I think the best answer to the question is already written, a lyric, "Speed Increased to Scaffold" from our coming album *Neoni.sm*.

"Naomi does the catwalk even when it snows, Male photographers so envious it shows. The stage, their temple, their trampoline to trance, Trampled and turned by the transvestite's dance. It is not Naomi, it is the Marlboro Man. If you want to run, I understand."

SOLEFALD, LUMBERVEIEN 102, 4621 KRISTIANSDAND, NORWAY.



8-RED (Bel) - Undervalued Feelings CD'97
DIEHARD MUSIC

Their bandname reminding me (maybe it's even borrowed, perish the thought!) of an **Anthrax** song on the *Persistence of Time* record, **8-Red** deliver eleven or so shortish songs of not very entertaining hardcore/death metal crossover. Their clean-cut, percussive production clears the way for all of that rhythmic chugging, but there is diddly-squat else of interest here. Music has three components; melody, harmony and rhythm. *Undervalued Feelings* propensity for the latter does not make up for the shortcomings of the other two. Hell, I thought these type of acts were all, "Hey, we're from a tough neighbourhood, life is a struggle" mentality? I'm sure **8-Red** would love some of the action too, but they lack even the streetwise attitude that gives that hardcore feel to the music. There's not enough urban aggro there, and if that's deliberate then the ideas are unstimulating anyway. You can't fool me with those 'staccato' riffs, even if you use a lot of vocal overlay to gain an inkling of depth to the soundscape. The band's only other noteworthy feature is their minor obsession with the media: the cover picture features a man about to hammer in his television against a background of newspaper headlines, while one of the song features a CNN-type broadcast. Perhaps the guys are looking for something to get angry enough about, in which case I suggest they keep searching.

ABIGAIL (Jap) - Intercourse and Lust CD'96
MODERN INVASION

Unremarkable dirty Jap blackthrash with a few redeeming features, present mainly in the measured pace of the final song, "Hail Yakuza", with it's desperately weird and almost inane sampling from some Japanese Mafia gangster film. When hard pressed, **Abigail** can produce some good riffs, but the overall mediocrity is evidence of why the Japs haven't become as successful as either **Sabbat** or **Sigh**. The album features a decidedly strange penultimate instrumental for good measure.

ABLAZE MY SORROW (Swe) - Plague CD'97
NO FASHION RECORDS

A sophomore effort from these Swedes who - predictably - fail to live up to any of the superlatives their label brands them with. Slowish with more of a heavy metal feel than their unremarkable debut, and even a couple of walls reminiscent of **Helloween's** Michael Kiskel. The band decided to fill the pages of their stylish inlay booklet with x-ray pictures, ironic really because if you x-rayed the music there wouldn't really be much of note; the music is a let-down and the production too thin and weak. Not enough steel to trigger the airport metal detector here. Suspect drumming guides unoriginal melodies and try-hard vocals, the tunefulness only being enjoyable on the odd occasion ("Into the Land of Dreams"). Hackneyed lyrics add a distinct touch of manic-depression to the subject matter. Still, they give us a nice outro; a charming piano melody over a wash of radio static. Unfortunately, I am now so fully habituated to Swedish death metal that only a heavy clout to my head will re-sensitize me, and even in the form of the new **Opeth** album it's not sufficient.

ABSU (USA) - In the Eyes of Ioldánach MCD'98
OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Somewhat perplexed by the frantic direction the Texans veered off in post-*The Sun of Tiphareth*, these four tracks don't make a lot of sense even on second or third listens. After taking extra time getting to grips with the obscure, twisting, often almost chaotic riffs, I am still nonplussed. Proscritor's drumming is sheer genius; crazily fast, chopping and changing on a whim so that one feels quite unsure just what the hell the rubber-limbed man is doing (and what substances he's abusing). In addition his vocals push on the preposterous, although his rabid semi-melodicism on "Manannán" is bizarrely appealing. Furiously complicated and fast, obscure riffing struggles to overcome the blasting percussion, and as a whole, **Absu** don't have the vision they once had. They must take care not to overdo the speed and technicality at the expense of songwriting and atmospherics. This is a cryptic and vigorously inaccessible recording, and I for one am not convinced.

ABYSSOS (Swe) - Together We Summon the Dark CD'97
CACOPHONOUS RECORDS

The wafer-thin production leaves the guitars sounding rather like the Durham-based band **Morstice** once did. The cover art is not (unfortunately) parodying **Cradle of Filth**, since musically the Swedes have borrowed more than the image and vampiric outlook from those of Suffolk. The third song is a chest-beating black metal anthem in the time-honoured fashion, and manages to resurrect the release from mediocrity and bleak irrelevance.

ACHERON (USA) - I ex Talonii/Satanic Victory CD'97
BLACKEND RECORDS

A redundant re-release of a CD and MCD, especially since all inlay details and interesting anecdotes are utterly absent. Unremarkable organ and synth intros courtesy of one Pete Gilmore with one exception (a mock-epic piece) and a Nietzsche quotation from *Der Antichrist*. We all know **Acheron** equals La Vey Satanism, and musically that it relates to slow, double-bass-rolling, over-soloing and generally tedious death metal. Meritable musicianship is wasted here since the music is totally basic and uninteresting; appealing to the lowest common denominator must be a key point in their satanic message. Needless to say, the lyricism is laughable, surely lapsing into self-parody in "Prayer of Hell". Admittedly, there is the catchy "The Entity" and healthy riffs of "Enter My Heaven", but things are let down by a predictable outro. The *Satanic Victory* songs are infinitesimally more memorable, showing the band consolidating their own character ("Seven Deadly Sins") to a state when, with later releases such as the *Alla Xul 77*, they would be creating bigger waves. Only the slightest melody is present in the guitar solos, so in my view they should be binned. Had this been done just after La Vey's death last

October, Plastic Head could have used it as a cash-in. The fact that they did not only shows how pointless this release is in 1998. Too bad Michael Piesch/Lethal Records didn't do a good job screwing the band over properly the first time round.

ACID DEATH (Gre) - Pieces of Mankind MCD'97
METAL MAD RECORDS

Wahey! Exciting semi-technical death with a lot of influences from fusion styles. The first five songs are top-notch, and sound contemporary without being boring. A Mediterranean grooviness compounded with deadly verve and punch create a warm and invigorating mixture. There are a plethora of intricate solos and classical/jazz use of songwriting. Powerful, melodic, with a strong production, and a potent vocal performance help - despite the concluding songs not being as strong - to crown one of the most interesting death metal releases of 1997. I'd like to hear more bands playing technical death, so let's hope it will be the next trend. The time will come I'm sure, because it's not the most popular genre these days, and it would make all that retrothrash seem worth suffering through.

ADORIOR (UK) - Beyond the Distant Blue Demo'97

I raised an eyebrow when one of these musicians wrote to me bragging about a four-album deal with Head Not Found, certainly in the light of hearing their rough-and-ready black metal. Then I heard a rumour that Metalion had not signed them at all, or had dropped them, but rumours betray the fact that they released their debut *Like Cutting the Sleeping* on said label but months ago. **Adorior** play their music with a hefty whiff of **Darkthrone**, the obvious difference being Melissa Hastings' demonic vocals (you'll either love 'em or find them utterly irritating). On the title track she sings naturally for a couple of lines, and sounds a lot sweeter than the larynx-retching elsewhere. The sound on the tape (recorded at a studio down the road from my humble home) is very bass-heavy, with the drums very low and the vocals attempting to make up for it. I find little entertaining in the messy approach the band display, where simple, warbling, nondescript trilled riffs are sporadically interrupted by solemn bassline solos. While the band are trying their hardest to appease their darker natures - "Release your soul to evil" vocal lines and all that - they occasionally achieve that barren, depressive feeling that is present in all true dark music. Thus, the only decent track, "The Scarlet Hordes of Autumn" peddles a damn fine plodding riff which shears cold and hatefulness toward the listener's ears. As I have hinted though, the overall picture is not conducive to being awarded a record deal so early. I'd love to praise these Surrey blacksters, but they really don't have it cut out yet. 13 GLENROSE HOUSE, 2 BENVILL WOOD ROAD, SUTTON, SURREY SM1 4HT, ENGLAND.

ADRAMELECH (Fin) - Seven MCD'98
REPULSE RECORDS

It can't be that easy to play grinding death metal with the vitality and pounding violence of *Seven*. Inserting slower, groovier moments sure help though. Otherwise **Adramelech** lay down the law with juggernaut rolling bass drums and compelling powerchords, and it's leaden heavy stuff. The new material comprises three songs of latent brutality with the odd slam part thrown in, while there are a couple of live tracks from a Dutch show in '97 here too. The latter, being older songs, don't possess the character of the others, and despite a reasonable go at capturing the live verve on disc, aren't worth staying up past your bedtime for.

AGONY (Cze) - Split 7" '97 w/ FORGOTTEN SILENCE (Cze) / From Red Heaven MCD'97 / Abandonment Demo'96
OBSCENE PRODUCTIONS

The split single demonstrates two decent bands putting a bit of effort into making their own brand of death metal, though in the end **Forgotten Silence** are both more original and more convincing than **Agony**. The latter's effort features almost rustic folk synth forays from within slow doomy death territory, but it is an awfully dry prospect on a sunny summer day and one that leaves me crying for some juice in the production. **Agony's** plangent metal uses synth atmospheres that are at times way too forced to work and feel natural. Their heaviness works well with the useful riffs they employ but it all needs more soulfulness. So, flip the single over and you'll find a jazzier, more technical approach to the genre. **Forgotten Silence's** track mixes dissonant synth with lighter progressive moments and dynamic double bass drum workouts. The band have measurably improved since the *Thots* demo and are becoming very fresh-sounding and convincing indeed. **Forgotten Silence** are the sort of band you want to play to impress your more highbrow musical pseudos if the latter scoff at the prospect of intelligent death metal. (\$4)

Agony's MCD isn't too far off the mark either, and is brimming with more ideas than most. Opening with the strongest track, which brims with oodles of layered synth and exchanges a lot of melodies between rhythm and acoustic guitars and the vocal lines. Multiple female vocals - with excellent rhythmic male/female vocal interplay - feature together with background moaning here also. **Agony's** sound, invariably due to the second-rate production, is fragile and slightly esoteric. Luckily the sound is richer than that on the split 7", although the vocals are still paint-strippingly acidic. Flouting the warmer texture is a downright hideous string sound which whines tediously on more than the odd occasion, but this is good quality listening for the more discerning deathster.

GEHENNAH (Swe) - Decibel Behel CD'97 / INFERNO (Nor) - Downtown Hades CD'97
OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

This retro thing is getting very boring very fast, yet Osmose released these two albums within a fortnight of each other. Altogether I don't like retrogressive, primitive music much but let's compare the two anyway:

	Gehennah	Inferno
Duration:	33'19"	29'56"
Tracks:	12	10 (12 on LP)
Artwork:	Obviously rushed and poor	Better but not as good as their first sleeve
Production:	Weak sound-picture with half-hearted guitar sound	Heavy production with a balanced mix and that tinny '80s guitar sound.
Vocals:	Functional, main thrust is through the lyrics	Twisted and sick with all sorts of retching and a great closing scream
Music:	Fewer memorable riffs, not enough variation	Great first track, otherwise not attention-grabbing apart from the odd riff such as in "Bulldozer"
Shock value:	"I Fucked Your Mum", complete with sound effects, funnier biography and better song titles	OK, so they lost on this one
Overall:	Pointless solos, no clear choruses and a limited attention span rating, but then it is more retro	Better musicianship and feel. Better riffs but still structure is dull and mind-numbing. This one wins, but not by

Back further in time, the band's demo of the previous year showed little of the innovation later aired, although the general direction is similar. Musically boring, with the odd passable riff and that same Nevada Desert production, *The Abandonment* struck me as completely unremarkable. The unstructured orchestral tendencies manifest themselves through some pastoral, uneventful episodes. The last track - something akin to an atrocious metal chamber music workout - is the nadir of the whole demo, being as it is disastrously messy.

AGONY, c/o MARTIN, BILKOV 77, 380 01 DACICE, CZECH REPUBLIC.

ALASTIS (Swa) - Revenge CD'98 promo tracks
CENTURY MEDIA

I almost choked on my double chocolate chip cookie while reading the press notes/marketing spiel on the sleeve of the promo. The offending statement? I quote: "Revenge...clearly portrays the band's refusal of [sic] being just another band in the vein of labelmates **Samael**, **Moonspell** and **Tiamat**." Any dolt can hear that **Alastis** are just **Samael** without the crazy originality; this has got to be a violation of the Trade Descriptions Act! The two tracks solely (and meanly) provided are atmospheric, pounding beasts, but they don't really have what it takes to light the fires at HQ *The Dead Sea*.

The Woodhouse/Sorychta axis bleeds yet more half-baked metal.

ALGAION (Swe) - General Enmity CD'97
WOUNDED LOVE RECORDS

Hey, did these guys read my review in the last *Dead Sea*? Now they're using truly awful vocals with some weird microphone effects, but they have slowed down as I advised. The black metal approach has been toned down and more death/melodic power metal ideas have been woven in. Unconventional vocals here stick out so sorely that they frankly ruin the record. More of their own identity has been forged, but this is hit-and-miss; plenty of good riffs and melodic ideas which in practice do not integrate coherently. A mix of dissonance and melody, some songs have twin-guitar with semi-classical runs and enjoyable fast licks (the best of which have no vocals) that do grow on you. The two melodic themes of "The Angel of Decease" are a personal favourite. Songs are compact with neat and precise riffing, and some groovy solos too. There's a clear, modest production, but this is a little shy of its niche, whilst the adaptation is not forced or unnatural instrumentally. Great aspects are apparent such as the teeth-clenching aggression of the title track - almost retro in the best possible way - with modern-day misanthropic song titles. Still, the mix of happier melodies and darker cynicism is not overly convincing.

ANASARCA (Ger) - Godmachine CD'98
REPULSE RECORDS

Such is the apathy surrounding common-or-garden death metal that when Relapse's press release reverts to meaningless hyperbole - the certainty that *Godmachine* is "going to become a classic" - no one even bats an eyelid. Half of this band are ex-**Vomiting Corpses**, the faceless death metal band who had an album out on Invasion Records not so long ago, and with the other members here gallantly try to fuse the European and American death metal genres. This they do, in so far as the release has ultra-low gravel-mixer vocals, a large bottom-end, but at the same time a sprinkling of melodic guitar riffs. However, at the end of the day, it's all very ho-hum, nice and inoffensive stuff. **Anasarca** aren't going to turn any heads, and I wouldn't put any money on them doing it in the next few years either. Until then, I'm sure Repulse will continue with their wishful thinking. After all, whether death metal has passed away or not, it's always important to remain opti-

mistic, ain't it?

ANCIENT CEREMONY (Ger) - Under Moonlight We Kiss CD'97
CACOPHONOUS RECORDS

Unfortunately the music is not as romantic as the title suggests; this is a good example of a band that is flying before they learn to walk with their heads held high. The drums are so loud in the mix and the production so frail that unless the bass is turned down on your stereo, the whole picture is spoiled by awkward, clumsily bludgeoning bass drums. Often a mess of over-instrumentation, with synths and totally lacklustre female vocals; the record is fatally flawed by damn awful Teutonic-accented narration and below-average, insipid death growling. Not surprisingly then, the most impressively convincing piece is the half-minute mock-harpsichord neo-baroque instrumental "Vampyre's Birth". Despite many heroic attempts to create soul-stirring atmospheres, these Germans desperately need structure in their songs if they are to create anything really worthwhile. Getting in touch with Chris; the Ceremony's Rossetti enthusiast, I was assured that their next album *Fallen Angel's Symphony* will be blessed by a much improved, Gerhard Magin production, will have another female chanteuse and songs which are "a bit straighter in their structure". Their hearts are in the right places, I can tell, and there are valuable leanings here trying to break through. Particularly coming to mind are a couple of soul-rending minor progressions which could be devastating if they were conveyed with true power.

ANGEL DUST (Ger) - Border of Reality CD'98
CENTURY MEDIA RECORDS

Steady heavy metal with the barely discernible German accent no doubt raising many a wry smile. Not at all bad, but devoid of the real melody needed to make power metal succeed in my book, with superfluous, redundant soloing and over-sugary synthwork doing some damage to their appeal. Though well-performed throughout, I detect the need for a little more soul, without the melodrama which the guys push a bit too far. The melodicism is weighted too much on the vocals rather than the guitars but there's some great Bewitched-style riffing on the title track. Strangely artificial atmospheres and not enough direction or push mean *Angel Dust* don't quite pass the quality control. Interesting to see what they would come up with if they got their hands on some real angst.

ANGELCORPSE (USA) - Exterminate CD'98
OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

I thought I told them not to send me any more of this? Well, I suppose Helmkamp's lot have tightened up a bit, sounding now more like a low-budget *Morbid Angel*. Still it's sterile, chaotic and nondescript death metal way too average for me to comment at length upon. *Angelcorpse* probably take pride in not ever crossing the line, and never providing anything invigorating for us to chew on. Half-decent songs such as "That Which Lies Upon" are beginning to materialise, with riffs that are less ragged and more chunky but unfortunately we are still lumbered with the stupid soloing. Apparently there are now two guitarists, but I would never have guessed without reading the biography. May I suggest the following disclaimer: listen only when drunk.

ARCKANUM (Swe) - Kostopher CD'97
NECROPOLIS RECORDS

Coming with a strangely obscure, yet detailed inlay booklet, wholly in (ancient) Swedish and therefore incomprehensible, the lyrics of this record are almost impossible to follow. The protagonist recalls a shy, more sinister Mortis without the propaganda-machine. Cheap, dry production and a reedy vocal with echo effects. The two-dimensional sound isn't a hindrance to the best features; the folksy feel of the opener with the answering vocal phrase technique. The general basis is using melancholic, grade 3 guitar riffs over blasting drums, with some viola in places later on. The latter features in the chilly, shrill screamed intro leading into the owl-hooting, wind and percussion-backed female singing offered somewhere in the middle. Whilst there is a degree of dynamic variation and tempo contrast, the whole is too homogeneous, sounding too much like an outburst of half-hearted rage; an obscure, chaotic feeling with no real structure to be found. *Kostopher* is lively and intense but sonically miles too messy. Almost original in the wrong way as it feeds off that arcane feeling, but not a subtle release that begs you to spin it again.



Swedish blacksters Grim as depicted on their flyers - black metal narcissists à la Mortis or what? Oh, y'know they also sell posters with a different montage...

ARMAGEDDON (Swe) - Crossing the Rubicon CD'97
WRONG AGAIN RECORDS

Here we have some trademark Amott widdle from sibling Chris in his powerful death metal combo. A mix of elements from his own *Arch Enemy* and elements of *Atheist*, with plenty of the good ole Swedish feel. *Crossing the Rubicon* lyrically is a rather awkward and unoriginal concept album concerning the flight from post-apocalyptic Earth in a space shuttle only to collide with the sun - thankfully 40% of the songs are lyricless. Credit due for the skilled drumming in the jazzy sections of the excellent "Godforsaken", and the almost superfluous integration of bongo drums and percussion in "Galaxies Away", Ever so slightly lightweight vis-à-vis *Arch Enemy*, especially on the vocal side of the show. Still, it makes good use of old heavy metal ideas and those tried-and-tested classical progressions in "Funeral in

Space", together with the use of the ubiquitous violin and (not so omnipresent) recorder to create a lullaby. Find too a bluesy and over-indulgent tendency in the song "Astral Adventure", which sounds tongue-in-cheek, a tendency that rings true for the general soloing. The songs lack *je ne sais quoi*, aside from the ones I've highlighted, and "Into the Sun" which possesses healthy quantities of off-the-wall jazziness and bright melody. If Mr. Amott worked on moulding the band's identity on these lines, we'd have a great new prospect. Oh, the production also demonstrates the superiority of Studio Fredman over Sunlight in my book.

THE ART OF DETHRONEMENT (Hun) - Hymn... for the Depest Autumn Demo'98

Sounds like someone wants to be *My Dying Bride*. You know, seven members plus two session musicians; lots of violins, cellos and synths, that sort of thing. Not to mention the cover art, where the Hungarians snatch the idea from *Like Gods of the Sun* and mutate the butterfly to a death's head moth (*Silence of the Lamb*), then superimpose the imago onto a twisted Jesus. While comparisons to *Celestial Season* and *MDB* are flattering, they are not inaccurate save for a playing down of the orchestral and sometimes almost pathetic melodrama of this demo. The first song possesses a gentle grace, being a melodic surge suffering both from a shallow production and the rough vocals. Singer Tom is no Aaron, and his grunts are too coarse for the endeavour of the musical ideas. The mix of instruments is not arranged as well as it might have been, and the third song simply sounds like an imbroglgio of classical pretension. A better, faster concluding track improves upon things with more texture and vividity, and if "Dethronement" can work on the strengths of this and their best song: "The Cold Kiss", they will be really getting somewhere. \$5 (EUROPE), \$6 (ELSEWHERE) / LASZLO DOMJAN, HELSINKI UT 10/B, H-1203 BUDAPEST, HUNGARY.

AS DIVINE GRACE (Fin) - Lumo CD'97
AVANTGARDE MUSIC

Lumo has a nice dreamy sound-picture although the production is a little diaphanous, the drums sounding weak in isolation. This is drifting-away music with rich female vocals. Wonderful grand, epic, woebegone layered female vocals star in "Rosy Tide"; a beautiful song lulling you with eponymous grace. With an individual, astral combination of synth and textured guitars, the track "Perpetual" has an addictive and slovenly hook. An abstraction that with time sinks its claws into you. Many will brush this away; after all this is girly music for many, the yin for the yang. Anima for animus. The unfortunate impression of looseness takes some getting used to, with the vocals sounding fragile when not layered and unexposed, some tracks being rather too lacksadaisical. The sporadic, faraway male vocals are in keeping, without ever seamlessly integrating themselves. Forgive slightly silly narration in "The Bloomsearcher", *As Divine Grace* do much better when they have direction, otherwise the tracks tend to wash over you all too easily. In short, sixty minutes of night-time music with bursts of brilliance to stay awake for, or that mirror your most wonderful dreams. Still, *Decoryah* would give them a run for their money if they used a half-decent production.

ASGAI (Ger)/PLEURISY (Hol) - Waves/Unholy Spheres Split CD'97
MAGNIFICENCE RECORDS

Pleurisy remind me of murky deathrash, a band not quite ready for their own CD release. Dissonant in that they do not sound totally in tune but generally melodic, with a scream and grunt double-vocal approach. The Swedish influence is detectable at background levels, as well as some early *Misanthropic* tendencies on "In Darkness/Mortification"; a neat and pleasantly-riffed song. Colourful, even with blast beats punctuating the proceedings, with a more-than-passable black metal riff in the title track. Certainly a promising band but, as yet, too rough around the edges. Watch out for the great acoustic harmony overlay in "Devastating Authorisation" before the song gets all messy and disjointed. *Asgaia*, by contrast, seem one-dimensional, and try to use piano/synth to fill in the gaps. Good strong vocals accompany simple tunes, it's at times catchy but damn unoriginal. Their hackneyed lyrical stance takes in the Marquis de Sade, atheism, the Black Death et al. "After the Waves" is a naïve, charming, environmental statement, but is about the only thing you'll remember after an hour in the band's company. The songwriting is mediocre but not altogether dull, for the contemporary, *Machine Head* school of riffing they learnt to play at is heavily oversubscribed and hence characterless. *Pleurisy* certainly seem more settled than *Asgaia* and are consequentially more enjoyable.

ASTARTE (Gre) - Doomed Dark Years CD'98
BLACK LOTUS RECORDS

Featuring a label on the promo cover proudly proclaiming *Astarte* "the first all-female black metal band ever!" is all but bound to enrage *Ebonsight*, who seem to have been too busy rearranging their anti-Mortis campaign after their emigration to these shores. Females in black metal aren't exactly ubiquitous - the few suffering from a lot of sad male fandom - but it seems patronising to suggest that an all-female black metal band should be touted in such a way. Anyway, with the exception of the pedestrian final track, the drum machine hammering away beside the buzzing guitars and synths bring to mind a more



refined *Godkiller*; refined because the synth is far more layered and three-dimensional than *The One From Monaco*. The gals obviously lend an ear to the *His Lysit Tar Oss* school of trancelike, long-song, simple black metal, although don't quite have *Vikernes'* ear for pounding orchestration. Surprising how masculine the singing is too, I'd be buggered if I knew it wasn't a *scion* of darkness behind the microphone. Anyway, the aforementioned comparison is not effective since *Astarte* don't dwell on their half-baked riffs long enough for you to be hypnotised. Unfortunately, while the music is far from abysmal *per se*, songs tend to lead you round in ever-decreasing circles, never reaching any plateau or creating tension and relieving it (one of the skills of creating great music). Something of a Hellenic feel is barely detectable, but that may be down to the fragility of the at-times horrible metallic guitar twanging.

ASTRAL SHADE (Jap) - Excelsior Demo'97

I thought the Japanese metal scene only produced *Sabbat*, *Sigh* and retrotrash? Obviously not, since *Astral Shade* play something akin to power metal with some blastbeating and death roaring taking place here and there to keep you on your toes. In fact, the growling is the main component of the vocalisation, at least in the verses. However, in the choruses, harmonised singing proper is the order of the day. Thus, between the pleasant melodies of intro and outro there are three songs of schizophrenic metal. That's to say there's a folksy (perhaps Oriental) spring to these songs that doesn't quite fit with the death metal between. The '80s feel detectable is much more congruous, and some of the catchy moments rely on that heavy metal vibe. *Excelsior's* best aspect is the way the synth and guitars play off each other, and if they can strengthen this and the as-of-now rickety melodic element, *Astral Shade* could be going places. Scrap the garish cover though lads, it almost gave me a migraine. \$5 / TAKAHIRO NAKAYAMA, 2-2-5-202, NONO, TORIKAI, SETSU-CITY, OSAKA 566, JAPAN.

ATHOTORGH (Mal) - Promaster Diyana MCEP'97
ULTRA HINGAX PRODUCTION

It seems you have to visit the developing world - in this case the active Malaysian scene - if you want to hear real thrash metal these days. These guys do well what *Gehennah* and *Inferno* can only rudely mimic. Taking influence from *Venom*, *Sodom*, *Destruction*, *Mercyful Fate* and *Slayer* may be limiting and unoriginal, but for *Athotorgh* it is indeed that rather than daylight robbery. "G.M.F." is heavy metal from start to finish, with those anthemic choruses and even *Priest*-like high-pitched vocals, while "The Rites" has that machine gun riffing so beloved of the best '80s guitarists. Admittedly, *Promaster's* vocals are suspect (yes, that is his name) but it all adds to that slightly rough-around-the-edges production. The middle songs don't show the kind of viciousness really necessary in order to make an impact, but the songs that do work are much more thrilling. As further inspection of my reviews will show, I have little time for those who thoughtlessly and half-heartedly copy the old thrash style, but these guys actually make some enjoyable noise which definitely seems to be in tune with their souls.

AVULSED (Spa) - Cyborgers CD'98
REPULSE RECORDS

Rotten's lot have released an album of remixes from their *Eminence in Putrescence* CD in the vein of *Fear Factory's Remanufacture*. All these are in the techno/jungle/drum 'n' bass direction, and for me as a detractor of the Spaniards' last album, it would be the quality of the remixing that would break this release for me. All the tracks remain reasonably faithful, in particular the last one, which has emerged virtually unscathed (see the pun?). The rest of the songs keep much of the guitar riffing and even some of the death growling, but add a variety of beats over the top, thus seeming to provide an adequate distance from the songs without completely losing them over the hill as it were. Thus, "Powdered Flesh", the best song on the last CD, has metamorphosed into "Powered Fish", and luckily is based around the best riff of the track, and in so doing finds renewed favour with me. While the rest of the music is never so interesting, the different flavour of each remix is commendable, and some credit to a grind band for doing something a little different. I know *Fear Factory* provided the impetus, but them grind bands tend to be a conservative lot. In addition the CD has a video clip (and a good one at that) of "Powdered Flesh" and lots of

detailed info on the band through CD-ROM.

AWAKE (Fra) - *Awake Demo '97/Adv. CD tracks '98*

This demo recording has a crisp, if dry, 24-track professional sound, helping the tight musicianship to pack a punch. Musically very trendy, with heavily borrowed vocals, guitar sound et cetera from the current Bay Area scene. These facts mean they are likely to be signed soon, although they are perhaps hindered by their nationality, and their unfortunate naming of songs; "Hideous Barnyard Monstrosities" the worst offender. Bouncy but with a streak of angry attitude turning things nasty. The rhythmical, technical side of *Awake* is most enjoyable, especially when the listener is drunk or angry; this is coarse sorta music. The scratched record approach to many of the rhythms is over-obvious rather than interesting, although there are some melodies here too. The advance tracks are toned down a little, with silly powerless melodic vocals halfway through and are musically less colourful, but still semi-technical. Hints of *Nine Inch Nails* in the intro thankfully do not metastasize later on. I'd prefer originality to regurgitation of things over the pond. At least add your own seasoning and do it right, like *Acid Death*. The self-titled demo is 30FF / c/o PIERRE MICHALSKI, 1 RUE LAZARE BICKART, 25 400 AUDINCOURT, FRANCE.

B.A.S.H. (UK) - *On the 7th Day God Created Masturbation Demo '97*

I don't know these guys, honest! Lee (Sterilised Decay) just sent me this fun project of his and the lads from *Broken* to review, and it's fun if you're into songs with names like "Cockney Wanka", "Fuck!!!", and "Itchy Cock". Lovely. From the disgusting (but tragically true) intro documentary narration about female circumcision, everything goes deliberately downhill. Almost all songs are played with blast-beats, accelerating tempos, screaming baby vocals, and total lack of seriousness. There are some great parodies of other styles and songs, such as "Wank This Way", bits of blues and rock 'n' roll etc, but I can't see anyone wanting to buy it. The sound quality really sucks too, but do you give a shit? *B.A.S.H.* don't. The most enjoyable shite I've heard this year. Contact Lee Edwards from the Sterilised Decay label address.

BEHEADED (Mal) - *Promo '97*

X-TREME RECORDS

Uninspired mid-paced death metal with a growl/snarl-overdubbed vocal approach (did someone mention Steer and Walker?) sums up *Beheaded*. Limited dynamic variation can be found as well as melody mainly present in the soloing. Too standard, and the even-more-standard synth that crops up once in a while doesn't help matters much. Yawn. Still, better than a dodgy black metal demo eh?

BENIGHTED LEAMS (UK) - *Astral Tenebrion CD '98*

SUPERNAL MUSIC

Eh, that Alex Kurtagis's a weird one, isn't he? While his lexicographic fascination and individual wit make reading the lyrics and press notes on this sophomore CD amusing, I fear there is no other real reason for going out to buy this silvery piece of plastic. The demo quality drum machine and strange vocals, despite the 32-track production still sound far too strange and distant for their own good, and notably thin at times. Whilst I must admit ignorance at how the actual music relates to the deep-space concept (which perhaps isn't as original as Alex makes out; cf. *Neptune Towers* et al.), I can't deny that the release, though flawed, has charm. It's a shame that so many of the riffs given an airing here remind me too vividly of the hazy debut album. Largely depressive, phantomlike and freeform, there's but one conventional home-spun melodic passage I can fathom in "Sinister Demiral Estranges the Seductive Looming", before the drum machine is locked on god-knows-how-many bpm for the final "Floundering the Aeons". Whilst this still nonpluses me, that doesn't mean to say that being unusual and obscure is necessarily very sexy; this isn't really music that thrills. Nevertheless, some of the best echoed screaming and crepuscular lyrical delivery I've heard can be found here. Alex didn't find my last review of his first promo "interesting", so I doubt he'll be too concerned with my indifference this time around. It always strikes me as unfortunate that such a dab hand at running a record company, mail order and art-emporium can't be the total renaissance man and create great music. Mind you, if he did, I'd be jealous.

BEWITCHED (Swe) - *Pentagram Prayer CD '97*

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

A CD that seems not to change or grow on you however many times you listen to it; while I enjoy *Bewitched's* speed metal more than retrotrash, this is really pushing my concentration span. Sure, there are good, even great, songs here; "Hallways to Hell" and "Hellcut Attack" to name a couple, but the Swedes don't offer anything worth bleeding for, and not really worth bleeding your cash for either. There's no transcendence in the music, on the contrary it's so earthly and carnal that it's like bad sex. Not a song to beat the great opener of their debut, and really I can't think of words to express this. More gigging music than anything else; good riffs but simplistic arrangements and nothing at all striking. The title track is off-putting too, the overdone satanic-black-mass-prayer type thing. Still many will warm to this, and its plethora of heavy metal clichés, but it's not intense enough for this guy.

BEYOND DAWN (Nor) - *Retivry CD '98*

MISANTHROPY RECORDS

Rejected by Candlelight, resurrected by Misanthropy, on first listen

Retivry is utterly bewildering, not to mention suicidally depressive. Backed up by machined percussion rhythms which are often complex yet repetitive, the trumpet of Dag Midbrød again being the defining feature of the band. Often minimalist, sometimes, as in "Stuck" almost trip-hop rhythmically, *Retivry* is hard to swallow, without being colourless. At times drunken (I wonder what *Godreal's* Crin would make of this), but never clumsy, sometimes libidinous and erotic (helped by the bedroom voice of one Espen Ingjerd), this is a subversive musical agenda to which almost any pretentious biography could fit without raised eyebrows. Credit to Misanthropy though; the biography is unremarkable. Hard to pin down and label; the title being ironic since this is not happy music. The uptempo menacé of "Tender" seems self-contradictory, whilst the less dramatic, more rhythmic yet striking "Breathe the Jackal" is more in keeping with what we heard on *Pity Love*, albeit even more disconcerting. The sinister sloth of the closing track means that each song is quasi-nihilist conceptually, frightening in the claustrophobia of "Life's Sweetest Reward". Good production and flowing songs are taken as granted but I don't know if I want to come back for more. A unique but very introverted experience.

BLACK ANGEL (Per) - *Rites Demo '97*

Intro courtesy of Carl Orff (remember *The Omen?*) and a lot of the music borrowing from *Napalm Death*, albeit in a more chaotic setting, with gutturally high-pitched, often preposterous (in the correct sense of the word, eh Misanthropy Records?) vocals. Lots of sound effects revolving around war and sex too. Apart from the imagery, this is more death metal than black, the blasting drums clouding everything out, although the production is far from awful. This has a basic approach (dump the synths next time), but remains fun in its context. Dirty black, and forgettable, *Black Angel* remain the first Peruvian band I've heard but are nothing to get excited about. \$6 / FELIPE MORENO, CORREO CENTRAL DE COMAS, LIMA 7, PERU.

THE BLOOD DIVINE (UK) - *Mythia CD '97*

PEACEVILLE/MUSIC FOR NATIONS

Curiously, and I forgot to ask Paul when I interviewed him, this CD seems to be a little divided between the songs before the two minute ambient-piece and those after. I prefer the ones before, since they seem to lack the experimental, rockier, often mellower elements of the others. Whilst I for one cannot resist the groove and swing of the title track, the Hammond organ and Darren White's strong vocal performance. Many of the vocal lines are indeed tricky, and Darren handles them excellently and at worst competently. Focusing on the better tracks then, "When Rapture Fades" is an epic, rolling sea of emotional turbulence with almost Spanish acoustic guitar overlaid, whilst "The Passion Reigns" is soft and elegant with its piano theme. This is ambitious and textured music of sophistication, and I almost feel the production could do with more amplification of the level of depth and feeling there. Technical skill, needless to say, is high, and "Leaving Me Helpless" has catchy hooks that your brain will absorb like blotting paper, albeit with strange effects in the background. After the surreal two-minute interval though, things do not seem the same until the moody closing number with its depressive zeitgeist. There is still an identity crisis, and maybe the boys were simply trying too hard? Songs tend to veer off in a rocky doom direction which I'm not keen on, at the same time they often sound unconvincing too. "Sensual Ecstasy", to name one, simply seems too diffuse and post-coital, almost drunken and trippy. However, the merit of this release (though it doesn't totally succeed) comes from the fact that the band conjure pictures and moods with each individual song, something many bands fail to achieve over a whole album. Shame about the split.

BLOODTHIRSTY MASSACRE (UK) - *The Sampler Tape Promo '97*

This is the work of the man responsible for all those tediously small colour-printed flyers. So small I couldn't stamp my propaganda details on the back, and that's what other people's flyers are for, hal This comprises extracts from the 1996 and 1997 demos, but I would be hard pressed to differentiate songs between the two recordings. Perhaps the later demo is a bit more focused, with less synth and more of a *Pitch Shifter* feeling. I haven't told you what the music's like, have I? I'd call it industrial with very distorted bass-end guitars and equally scrambled, ultra-low vocals. The latter often gives *Bloodthirsty Massacre* a sense of swampy, sludgy death metal. The drum machine either plods or goes haywire, and I can't say I like the

mess that often ensues. Once in a blue moon, a half-decent melody is audible, but for the most part things are kept simple, though garbled beyond belief. There's one riff here which is nicked from the '80s TV show *The A-Team*, whether that's a deliberate piss-take or not I leave for you to decide. Lots of sampled speech is thrown into the cauldron too, if you like that sorta thing. Both demos are free if you send a C-90 to: PAUL, 20 AINSLIE STREET, ULVERSTON, CUMBRIA LA12 7JE, ENGLAND.

BORKNAGAR (Nor) - *The Olden Domain CD '97*

CENTURY MEDIA

A disappointment. Seems that Century Media and Woodhouse Studios have combined to sap *Borknagar's* driving fury, the thing that itself made the debut such a heart-racing, passionate frenzy. True, the overall sound is richer and fuller, but the experience is now simply too diffuse and is simply not carried by a strong production; the guitars sound weak and a lot



Beyond Dawn - revelling beyond focal length

of the actual music is just too pedestrian. While as a whole, it's still good music, it lacks bite and appears uncommitted. How much of this can be attributed to Garm's indifference is debatable, but his vocals aren't at their best here. "Grimland Domain" is admittedly fast and cold (before the music calls time out and goes for a wander mid-track) but aside from the first two tracks the rest is strangely uninteresting. The quirkiness in the music needs to be ironed out, and there is a middle-agedness which is even reflected in Ivar Bjornson's instrumental, second-rate to the ones on the debut. "The Eye of Odin" is a nice, epic track with some heaviness and more in the vein of *Borknagar*, but again the guitars sound droopy and tired, powerless and unfocused. "Ascension of our Fathers", for example, is just a complete mess of a song. Is this an example of a great band destroyed by a big signing, because this is not a patch on the new hopefuls, *Forlorn* and *Falkenbach* to name a pair? Good as a background soundtrack but focusing on the music does not reap rewards, even with time.

BRAIATLALA (USA) - *Well Come to the Galaxy CD '96*

Do you remember *Mordred*? Well perhaps one of the bandmembers had a bastard son who turned transvestite and released this self-financed album, complete with clumsy but fair liner notes, and a charming self-photograph wearing lipstick and a cop hat on the front cover. Certainly the music is funky enough, with wonderful quasi-technical drumming. Musically very tight and rhythmic with melody and great musicianship (presumably a load of uncredited session musicians were used). The vocals are a little high-pitched, sometimes out-of-tune, and often off-putting with a few hints of Joey Belladonna (not such a bad thing). The lyrics are not the work of a wordsmith yet work surprisingly well in the sense of rhythm and tonality. A great, fresh listen after all the black metal, good music from an unlikely source. "The Present is the Mean" is by turns off-the-wall and then catchy in the chorus. There's a great balance of rhythm and melody, but overall this lacks something and the release is unhinged by it, not a very long way from a great CD otherwise. Benefiting from a hard percussive production, I suggest that perhaps the songs are too long (average six minutes is long in this style), concentrate on the more melodic sections and improve the (occasionally great) vocals and you'll be there. \$14 (cassette for \$12) / 584 CASTRO STREET, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94114, U.S.A.

BROKEN (UK) - *Skytorn LP '97*

STERILIZED DECAY PRODUCTIONS

Poor quality production sounds like a good-quality rehearsal session, the music an unconvincing amalgam of death, rocky doom and various extraneous influences. Musicianship thus seems sloppy than it is, creating an indecisive feel. A lack of identity permeates the album due to too much genre-mixing, the ideas sound stuck together without any model or skeleton structure. *Broken* try to do everything and achieve nothing, unsurprisingly. Some vocalisations sound very indie or even Seattle-influenced (the clean sung parts pretty much suck), with something of *Alice in Chains* in "To Shine Inside" (with the horrendous lyric, "I'll never forget your face", this has to be done well or not at all). It is difficult to convincingly flirt with this and then revert to a death growl backed up by double bass drum-running within a few bars, if the intervening period is insufficiently transitory. Certainly enough ideas and riffs for an English death metal band, but there is too much of a rocking style that dilutes much of the promise. Nice melodies do crop up; "Duality" boasting some of them, and "Surrender to None" most of the rest, but the heavy parts don't hit home hard enough. Note the nice *Master of Puppets* soundalike riff in "Emphasis" also. The title track is the pick of the bunch, even with the aggressive almost hardcore vocals. *Skytorn's* bounciness almost of-

Fast and widdly with a coughing vocal performance and an adequate production. This is a concept album; nothing less than a morality play about the protagonist being tempted by Satan, and finally realising he is beyond, both good and evil. Very trite and sub-**Helloween**. There's a Darth Vader sample on the second track though, so I guess that's OK. Enjoyable in a concentration-undemanding kind of way, with slightly annoying high-pitched guitar parts and some disjointedness, just twisted Swedish death metal really. A bit thin soundwise and certainly brittle in the bass department, I suspect more meat is needed on the bones, as with one of the guys in the band photo. Short and bitesize, *Far Beyond Divine Horizons* doesn't make a great impact, it seems almost like technical exercises set as music, a case of good musicianship and not-so-good songwriting perhaps, and a lot less soloing could help as well.

CYBELE (Nor) - *Brightly Blackhearted* CD'97
HEAD NOT FOUND RECORDS

This subdued, melodic all-girl group offer soft, yet sinister tunes dominated by rhythm. **Cybele's** main thrust is through arrangement and dynamics as opposed to complex riff structures. Atmospherically disconcerting, not least due to the threatening reverb on the slightly-strangely accented vocals. The stylish cover art reflects an almost minimalist approach; something like alternative rock crossed with **As Divine Grace**. While clever, original songtitles like "The Withering Position" endear me to their cause, I never was one for this cloudy, discordant, often mentally twisted soundscape. This is well-performed but drowsy and soporific, I think we could do with more of the Yang and less of the Yin, if the gals don't mind me saying, although this is anything but wimpy. There is a cello in a few places, working best in the catchy "Deathlike". Not my cup of broth, though quite individual and reasonably classy.

THE DARK DIVIDE (UK) - *My Wretched Soul...* Demo'96 / Promo'97

Just for the benefit of those who don't already know, the protagonist of this project was found drowned last year. Poor Oliver, such a young age to have left this mortal coil. Without the inclusion of any sympathy-for-the-deceased bonus points, one of these releases did show promise. The first recording comprises ultra-raw-and-fuzzy black metal with a somewhat clumsy drum machine and foggy, raucous, eerily-echoed vocals. Twisting from very fast to slower passages, there are good riffs here and a lot of talented and not-so-boring soloing. The first track has a dark, yet somehow playful theme which sticks in the head followed by more melancholic, digressive sections. Highlighting the demo is the title track, boasting astral synth lines which are strikingly heartfelt and definitely on the right track. The following year's recording was a turn for the worse, and is, quite simply a bad effort. Oliver told me that he was very influenced by **Immortal** at the time of composition, and it shows in the guy's voice and the formless fast songs. Unfortunately, the elements that redeemed the first demo had evanesced while all the production problems remain. Had I not known the respective dates of both the tapes, I would have assumed a reverse order to the actual chronology, since I try to assume a growth of character and individuality. I suppose - sadly - it doesn't matter anymore.

DARKLANDS (Swe) - *Chronicles* MCD'96
HEATHENDOOM MUSIC

Three songs of not-too-painful doom with a vocalist blatantly just out of Peter Steele school, with some tutoring by Glen Danzig; rather off-putting while at least different to the normal Swedoom/**Candlemass** thang. One song here is a rearrangement; "Dead But Dreaming", the others penned by the guys themselves. Good chunky production leaves a confident and assertively crunching guitar sound. More colourful than the brown, though cute, CD design artwork; a session violinist adds a melancholic edge, fitting in with the six and four-strings. Them songs are a little uninteresting, while not being lugubrious or trenchant, although a clear mood is conjured in the individual tracks. Non-eventfulness is a description a little too close

for comfort whilst not really being precise or indeed fair. A good effort, though too many spins drain spirit from my soul, and it would be a trudge for me to enter the darklands anymore.

cybele



DE OCCULTA PHILOSOPHIA (Ita) - *Obscura Sinfonia* MC'96
BEYOND... PRODUCTIONS

I shouldn't take the piss really. Believe me, it would be easy for you if you had the laughable, puerile lyric sheet in front of you. Even more so if you saw the band photo; the guys seem to be compensating for a very 'untrue' lack of long, blackened tresses by wearing hooded dark clothing, but I can see what you're up to! The music is much better than you would hitherto imagine, although it does leave something to be desired. From the proufing fairytales synthesiser introduction, we are drawn into a land of **Cradle of Filth**-inspired mid-paced black metal which sounds at least noticeably similar to

Opera IX from their native Italia. The vocals are more in line with **Ancient** in the Kaiaphas-era, and the marginally chaotic elements of the sound are stabilised by passable darting keyboards and lots of soloing. The songs on the second side of the tape are dramatic and more interesting, featuring ample melodicism and pipe organ embellishment. On the whole, the playing needs tightening; it's not completely loose but needs a more professional touch, and the banal sections need a swift kick up the backside. Having done that, I think **De Occulta Philosophia** will have some decent underground black metal together. They should then have flowing locks too, as long as mummy doesn't mind.

DEATH'S BRIDE (Bel) - *Death's Bride* Demo'96

Belgian metal isn't the most renowned scene; aside from **Ancient Rites** and **Avatar** (who?) there are precious few making noises worth talking about. **Death's Bride's** thrashy death metal falls on its face too often due to the dissonant guitar interplay which, though intended to create atmosphere, instead gives a feel more like a careless low-budget horror movie. Some of the moments are definitely fingers-down-the-blackboard ones, and the lightweight and unsatisfying production isn't the most helpful. The band need to watch and control their descent into punky drumming territory, because it does them no favours, and are in stark contrast to the infinitely better full-on death metal moments such as in the first song and title track. These tunes share the best riffs of the whole demo. Lyrically, things go from terrible pornographic storybook topics ("The Pure Pleasure of White Flesh") to some more creative imagery. Once the loose moments of *Carpe Mortem* are ironed out, strapping up and going for a more powerful approach will reap rewards. LARZ, HOLT 136/4, 3740 BILZEN, BELGIUM.

DEINONYCHUS (Hol) - *Ark of Thought* CD'97
SUPERNAL MUSIC

Oh boy, Marco Kehren hasn't been taking his Prozac - he's not just upset now, he's also extremely angry. Some of his vocal exhortations are the most striking I've heard since Herr Vikernes' screams on *His Lysset Tar Oss*; the sincerity is there together with pure black pain. Some will laugh, oh I know they will (cynical bastards), but don't tell me this is over-dramatic. He could have done better than the ultra-low vocal accompaniment though. Great tortured narration at the end of "The Fragrant Thorns of Roses", while a baby's screams punctuate the black hole nihilism of "Birth and the Eleventh Moon". Though most of the music is stratocumuloïd-grey, dense depression, there is room for the hope of "Revelation", with its lighter sections bathed in synthesiser-generated light. Mainly slow and doomy although both "My Days Until" and "Leviathan" push the mania on to a frenzy, at least in part. Lots of echo in the drum machine achieves a canyon-like vacuum of despondency in the music, never more so than in "Oceans of Soliloquy". This guitar-woven tapestry of pallid deathliness is a grandiose monument to hopelessness, and with the suicide-note vocal litany helps achieve a total nadir in emotion. Here even Mr. Kehren admits that "the pleasure of orgasmic rush" is not good enough any longer, it's really that bad. Neat acoustic twists and clever serpentine leads surface above crackling fire in "Serpent of Old", which still shows **Deinonychus** off as an at times clumsy dinosaur. The faster songs are not really being convincing enough, while trying to go too far to achieve a complex mood. Still, the desperate cries of "Please, show me the way!" are enough to move one to like this record. At times close to monotony, this record's overbearing guitar tone comes close to spoiling what is otherwise a work of minor genius. Let's hope Marco doesn't get any happier.

DELLAMORTE (Swe) - *Uglier and More Disgusting*
KRON-H

Is this what they call Discore? More like **Entombed** with more entertainment value, I'd say. Obviously the sort of music to operate better in the live environment (though as someone said to me at LA2 on the night of the Osmose tour, they could do with a better singer), and with the faster songs such as the opening title track. "Miss Lords" is as catchy as herpes from the concerned Traci, but instances such as "The Lies" are too slow and rolling death rock to appeal. "Plug Me In" is a good singalong, but overall **Dellamorte** are missing the stentorian power of **Loud Pipes**, for example. While having the groove ("As Much As You Hurt Me") and bluesy touches, this falls short of substance. Silly, drunken, distorted guitar soloing makes this far more boring than rock 'n' roll ever should be, with a noticeable dearth of good songs and striking riffs. And to cap it all, "Fallen Angel Crushes Dead" smacks blatantly of **Disember**.

DEMENTOR (Slo) - *Kill the Thought on Christ* CD'97
IMMORTAL SOULS PRODUCTIONS

Anti-Christian death metal from Slovakia (not Slovenia) that passes the exam grades for being taken seriously as an entry-level release while leaving me questioning just what one gets from their music. Beginning with a sombre introduction featuring crying children and machine gun snare drumming, *Kill the Thought on Christ* progresses to churn out passable, but largely uninteresting riffs, with an oaflike growl from vocalist René over the top. The final song, "Prometheus" seems to be a cover of an obscure band called **Tablatanka** and features garbling, higher-pitched exhortations. There aren't many problems with **Dementor's** music on a functional level, but as earlier hinted, there is precious little to have one coming back for more. *Kill the Thought on Christ* listening is like eating food not because you are

hungry, but because you're bored, nervous and need to avoid feeling your insecurity. (\$15)

DESECRATION (Ind) - *Goat of a Thousand Prap* Demo'96

Life is hard for metal fans from Java. You can see that by the fervour with which **Desecration** list Nuclear Blast in their thank-you lists just for the trouble of sending them a merchandise catalogue. Could we British be the ones soon in a similar position? Anyway, despite employing a grizzly bear as a vocalist, these guys wheel out some grindy death metal that is not that dissimilar from the craft of the Welsh band of the same name. A touch more death metal here though. Here also the sound quality is horrible, and the musical quality not much better. Let's hope for their sakes Glen Benton and **Decide** will not take them to task over the fact that **Desecration** have covered "When Satan Rules His World" - quite agreeably as it happens - and then credited all the music and lyrics on their demo as their own. Just a bit of naivety methinks. LEO, JL HALMAHARA 1/0 No. 9, JEMBER 68121, JAWA TIMUR 434132, INDONESIA.

DESECRATION (UK) - *Stillborn Climax* Tmp'97
TRAUMA RECORDS

You know, I can come home from a hard day's work and really appreciate **Desecration**. I just think of that power-drunk bitch abusing and irritating me and when that blast



Detestor

snare rifles through the speakers... well, you get the picture. Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating violence towards women (nor would I ever), but sometimes you just want traffic accidents to happen to particular people. **Stillborn Climax** is thus the ultimate non-executive stress toy. There's a surprising dosage of slower passages - some containing a hitherto unseen level of grooveiness - thereby quashing the boredom possible from unleashing an unrelenting torrent of ultraspeed grindcore. If you're a diehard fan of grind, go out now and get the Welshmen's latest full-length *Murder in Mind*, out on Copro Records. Cool stuff. I don't know the Trauma Recs. address but try getting in touch with Ollie at: P.O. Box 23, NEWPORT, GWENT NP9 8YG.

DETESTOR (Ita) - *Ego* MCD'98
BEYOND PRODUCTIONS

Capable and well-written death metal tunes with a heavy-duty feel to the production and riffing. Carefully entwining Chronos' low-end synthesisers into their brand of devastation has helped no end to produce a full musical texture that would put many more established names to shame. The introduction and "Burnt" are perhaps of spurious functional value, being rather warped, sound effect-based snatches of noise, but are at least faraway from the realms of the wind-and-waves samples now flogged to death by countless minions. The vocals deserve a mention too, being as they are rough yet word-audible and growler Jaiko is not afraid to attempt different styles; in so doing taking a lead from other genres. **Detestor** seem to have much more of an ear for a good song than most unsigned *tolemetal* combos, and this gives their style a mature streak of confidence. Certainly one of the better tapes I've received this year, and with improved, catchier songwriting I'm hoping for better things in the future. (\$10)

DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE (Swe) - *The Phantom Lodge* CD'97

ADIPOCERE RECORDS

Too bad Blackheim's musical Midas touch hasn't been put to use at Vincent's Adipocere; lack of promotion having cursed both **Diaboliical Masquerade** releases into near-obscurety outside the underground cognoscenti. *The Phantom Lodge* builds largely on the promise of the previous record's formula, although the problem (common to all sequels) is the lack of freshness which the debut displayed in abundance. On critical examination, the drums are too loud, the vocals too high, and the drums too obviously artificial. There is a snatch of retroism present now Blackheim hasn't got the release-valve of **Bewitched**, though luckily not in neat enough concentrations to bitter the release. Take a listen to the "Priest-like howls in "Hater" and corresponding old-fashioned riffing. Thankfully, the cavernous musical picture is intact, with more inklings of pomposity (as in the opening and ending of "Ravanclaw" [sic]) and extreme turns of speed; one or two sections doing their damndest to convince me that my CD player is jumping. "The Walk of the Hunchbacked", with its tasteful piano accompaniment, and the heuritic

operatics (not to mention preposterous titling) of "The Blazing Demondom of Murmurs and Secrecy" (the Millennium Dome, anyone?) both illustrate the paradox of the chilled atmosphere and synth-expressed warmth bathing the music. "Across the Open Vault and Away..." meanwhile is a two-minute quiet acoustic tapestry. Although sometimes sounding too rigid, and occasionally annoyingly childish, *The Phantom Lodge* is an obvious choice - though not altogether a sizeable progression - for anyone remotely convinced by the previous output.

DIONYSIUS (Ire) - *Of Dying Tears...* Demo '97

Dionysius are like the band in the house-next-door. Their music is sloppily-played, often out-of-time and simple, but is charming enough not to be written off outright. (Let's say you're on good terms with these particular neighbours and they agree only to play at sociable hours). The first track utilises keyboards and is my favourite, as it conjures up an agreeable, though subdued mood comparable to now-defunct English metallers **Enchantment**. It's that kind of swingin', melodic death metal we're talking about here. Some of the songs have a breezy, airy vibe, and it helps when they add the acoustic interludes in the style of Scotchmen **Serenade**. The warm and rich soundscape well suits the autumnal ochre-coloured treescrape demo cover, but I fear the guys will have to tighten considerably before they are to impress. Let's wait and see what develops. COLIN MEADE, 97 DOWNSIDE, SKERRIES, CO. DUBLIN, IRELAND.

DRAKKAR (Ita) - *Quest or Glory* CD '98

DRAGONTHRONE RECORDS

An Italian band singing in broken English about the Vikings, but I'll say no more. Their power metal suffers - as most of that genre does - from weasel-like lead vocals (if you thought Michael Kiske was bad then this ones got news for you!) and a bit too much over-indulgence with the electronic ebones and ivories. **Drakkar** do however intermittently crank out top-notch speed metal with those catchy choruses that make you wonder why you love them so much. The fourteen minute singalong metal of "The Walls of Olothoe" amongst other things stands it alone as a powerful song, while the choruses from "Coming from the Past" and especially the spiralling guitars of "Dragonheart" really make an impact for those who don't mind a slightly less puissant **Hammerfall**. Unfortunately much of the rest of the music is weak enough to be despoiled by the horrific singing and even more execrable normal diction and laughter, as on "Morella". The backing vocals, when eventually used, sound far better, even though the guy might not be able to climb the register as efficiently as the stoat impersonator he bows to. "Quest for Glory (Valhalla)" is another one that depends on its illustrious refrains (Quorthon and **Running Wild** take a bow), and just saves the disc from being laughable. Not nearly as worthwhile musically as **Nocturnal Rites**, I fear.

DRASTIC (Ita) - *Thieves of Kisses Advance* CD '98 tracks / *Creator of Feelings* Demo '97

The demo here was recorded in Venice in 1995, interestingly considering the place is more a cultural oasis devoured by tourists every summer. The one-man-band-dynamo Chris here also lists more than enough poets, writers and philosophers to convince you that he's into the more refined way of thinking. Not as developed as the later material, *Creator of Feelings* is knocking on all the right doors regarding individuality, but with vocals reminding me of a babbling infant no many of those portals are going to be opened. Chiara's female vocals brighten proceedings in the second song, but the rest of the demo is either formless and melancholic doomy death or ambient elevator music. The general lack of direction means that the tape seems to have no real impact, despite the worthiness of many of the component ideas.

Having listened to the two tracks on my advance tape at least five times in a row, I was again a little bemused as to what to make of it. The similarity I inevitably fell to making was with Polish new hopefuls **Darzamat**, largely due to the drum machine, female vocals, high synth fairytale melody lines, and a contrasting foreboding atmosphere. **Drastic** are a little bit more off-the-wall, with seemingly random song structuring, and also use a techno bass-thump or three on the odd occasion, which works rather well. Definitely one for those into originality, but **Drastic** need to work on the style, although they seem to be at least halfway there. The full-length will be out on Beyond... Productions, but get in touch with the man anyway. CHRIS BUCHMAN, VIA MORONINI 23, 30019 SOTTOMARINA (VE), ITALY.

DROPZONE (Fin) - *Rape Killing Murder...* Demo '96

Seeing as this was taped by Nalle straight onto the B-side of his main project **Gandalf's** demo, I hope he sees it fair that I make this one brief. **Discharge**-orientated material with a cover, a nice bass thump and generally energetic, purposeful intent. Some parts include **Napalm Death** tendencies and steer a more conventional death metal course. The main gripe falls with Jani's vocals, which are too close to those he employs in **Gandalf**, and to be frank, just don't suit the music. Best leave 'em out altogether methinks. Saving grace is that there is more than one vocal style (or another vocalist?), adding to the variety and occasionally going too far in trying to cover every possible note, high and low. Concentrate more on the Tolkienesque day job please Nalle. \$5 (EUROPE)/\$6 (ELSEWHERE) / ADDRESS AS FOR **GANDALF**.

EBONYLAK (UK) - *At Ghosts We Dance in Thrashing Seas* Demo '97

The best British demo of 1997, without a shadow of a doubt. After a

quirky but brief introducing synth passage, the crashing violence of "Amethyst Lung Concerto" storms out. A brief comparison to a more brutal **Nocturnus** could be made, before one of several time signature changes annihilates the similarity. Multiple layered synths used not in an orchestral, but more an abrupt dramatic and almost chaotic way, together with background chanted vocals immediately create a novel approach, which takes several listens to respect for the near genius it is. Sinistrous synths weave the music together, but the striking feature is the sheer power of the riffs as they are rhythmically rammed home; the vocals often abruptly shouted strictly off-beat. Working together in a way which few could arrange, the whispered vocals and church bell, raindrop-tinkling effects often colour meaty hooks. By turns unconventional and sporting pinched synth and dissonance; the music flows from disconcertingly catchy to blast beat and back again to low-key maliciousness. The sheer number of layers present here will show new sides on every listen, female vocals are here too, but you won't notice them amongst the chanting unless you listen carefully. Synth atmospheric segues of Lovecraftian terror join the amplified passages, in a manner that defies standard plagiarism. "The Theory of Sexual Carvings" has a chorus riff and an accompanying seductive vocal to die for. Each song is so strongly bound together in emotional charge, rhythmically tight, with a theatrical feel that occasionally gives **Arcturus** a run for their money. Not quite polished enough, with some almost too-off-the-wall approaches, but this is so very close to excellence. A heavy Academy production intensifies the idiosyncratic horror these Rotherham-based musicians create. The final track is a little more introverted and muted, with the final piano synth cadence raising a question mark through its interruption. Herein lies a great future for extreme music. See interview for address.

EINHERJER (Nor) - *Far Far North* MCD '97 / *Odin Owns Ye All* CD '98

CENTURY MEDIA

The MCD consists of one newie and a revamped *Love Vikinganden* (from NGP/Damnation sometime ago). It's an interesting contrast between the more technical subtleties of the latter and the thumping anthemic title track. The latter rides along with a bouncy tune and a singalong chorus, a little lacking in depth and perhaps going on longer than it should. Its ending is particularly weak and insipid too. The orchestral elements of the enjoyable older two songs have been brought forward, but somehow meanness is lacking and the right places are not stressed in the right way. Overall the Grieghallen sound is too coarse and brutal for that style, making the sound flimsy and lightweight. In many ways I prefer the original '77 production, since it was more roomy and ancestral.

Attempts to review the sophomore CD were at first hampered by the supreme second track "Out of Ginnungagap", whose catchy refrain and striking overlaid triplet rhythm devastates from the initial listen. Stylewise a further progression - these guys don't want to be pinned down - showing a much punchier, stripped-down approach topped by infinitely better vocals courtesy of Mr Ragnar Vikse. The focus of the record, when not embellished by gentle strings or dancing synth patterns, really does fall on this curly-maned man's shoulders. Displaying a range from surprisingly soulful crooning on "Remember Tokk" to the stentorian weight of the almost ludicrously bombastic finale "A New Earth", a track working brilliantly just above the level of self-important kitsch. Streets ahead of the growling on the debut are the new vocals, and they suit far better the more commercial heavy metal bounciness of the new material. By contrast, those hymnal group-singalong thungummies aren't so great here though. Musically ever so much more catchy, notably "Chief of the Elder" and "Home" being charismatic in the extreme, these bastards seriously know how to disrupt my work schedule. Without a doubt a more accessible offering (and one many seem to object to, more fool them), **Einherjer** - contrary to their less-than-friendly-and-smiling image change - are now very much more hard rock than *svartmetal*, and sound improved as a result. Now, if they had used some decent cover image, and changed their silly logo, this band would be skyrocketing!

EMPYRIUM (Ger) - *Songs of Moors and Misty Fields* CD '97

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

The flaws that almost ruined the first record are not entirely removed, but they have been sanded down to an extent where they are almost flush with the whole **Empyrium** experience. Markus Stock's vocals are at times shaky, but they do not induce cringing and laughter on a scale of that found with *A Wintersun-st...* The synths have been tamed a little too, and now have learnt the sirenian skill of gently lulling you under their spell, instead of the pompous and overstated grandiloquence they spewed forth on the debut. Integration of flutes and cellos have lent a more pastoral feel to the proceedings, but the epic, grandiose scale of the romanticism is still the prominent feature, most successfully employed in the impressive "Lover's Grief". If anything the compositions are a little too melancholic for their own good, that and their length often combining to create an often lugubrious, and despair-drenched picture almost crossing the border into tediousness. Still, the boys are going places fast, and have sorted the hard part out, in that their compositions have a strength of character that belies the band's youth. I

particularly enjoyed the soft, almost *Kveldsanger* night-time-forest-like touches to "Mourners" illustrating a harnessing of the technique of dynamics. Certainly one of the dozen best records of 1997, with just a little more improvement on the vocals and a fuller, more confident guitar ring needed to polish the experience.

ENS COGITANS (Rus) - *Heart of the Way* Promo '97

This classy eastern bunch should have released a CD on Seven Art Music by now, and this promo was sent to me as a taster for that full-length. Anyway, as well-performed and professional **Ens Cogitans'** music might be, having listened to this thrice I can't say that it hits me particularly hard. Apart from one excellent riff in the best and final song, there are few memorable sections, partly due to the freeform style of the progressive death metal played. The male/female vocal interplay is all well and good, but not as striking as partnerships such as those in **Theatre of Tragedy** et cetera (and I don't need to excuse myself for admiring that band - after all, Liv's a good-looking gal). Interestingly there is a section where the singers exchange marriage vows, before the middle piano instrumental. I think the band are into that romantic ideal (y'know, samples of beating hearts and crashing waves, to name a couple of forgivable clichés here), although they don't trumpet it that obviously. I'm sure that the album (out on Seven Art Music) consists of promising material, but it's very hard to see where the music - as a whole - is going.

ENSLAVED (Nor) - *Blodhemn* CD '98

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Grieghallen always suited Grutle and company much better than other acts. It's partly the reason why **Frost** remains for me one of the best extreme metal albums, although like all **Enslaved** releases, it has boring moments, tracks like "Fenris" just boil with hyperactivity and chilling crispness. **Blodhemn** sees the switch to Abyss Studios, and a sound much more comparable to **Marduk**. Of course, **Enslaved** actually write some good songs, so don't read too much into that last sentence. Coming to the fore on this release is the fast, aggressive drumming, whose shortcomings I believe spoil the songs on *Eld*. They don't need to miss Trym Torson anymore, because the slackness of the last full-length has been immeasurably tightened. The highlights of this disc are the strangely catchy title track and some of the stranger elements scattered around the nine tracks. "Nidingslakt" for instance, sports an unusually groovy melodic guitar solo, something I'd never expect to see on an **Enslaved** album. The final track is laddled with the Viking feel, although with a much more burdensome and subdued mood than ever more. Otherwise, a convincingly crushing record, that might just need a few more memorable tracks to really have what it takes to create a stir.

ENTIRETY (Ita) - *In Caelo Omnia Acciderunt* MCD '97

NORTHERN DARKNESS RECORDS

The tiny Italian label responsible for putting this out - as well as two other reviewed items here - almost shut up shop due to the onset of tremendous personal problems for the owner. Tracking this one down could thus be harder than otherwise expected. It's a shame because it is something of an enigmatic and eclectic mix of styles, loosely assembled under the umbrage of black metal. The growler's unpalatable snarl does its best to ruin proceedings, but creative and innovative songwriting partly saves the day, though itself not aided by coarse sound production. The primary influence would seem to be widely death metal, even though there are symphonic black metal leanings on one or two of the tracks. Cascading riffs and solos bring this closer to Swedish territory soundwise, but I suppose if anyone has the right to title their music in Latin, it is the Italian **Entirety** and not the Swedish **Abruptum**. Moderate outpourings of synth permeate the atmosphere, the ubiquity of which in the scene does little to lend these guys character. Luckily, the slight folksy touches a-here and a-there create more of an individual feel. Close to a superfluous release these days, but entertaining all the same. (\$11)

EPIDEMIC CAUSE (Jap) - *Far East* CDS '96

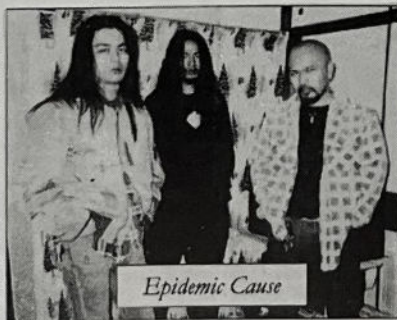
SHADOWS OF MICHELANGELO PRODUCTIONS

Three song outing by an oriental three-piece drawing on industrial and even noise as sources of inspiration. Commencing with an almost tribal drum machine beat, the music develops into over-rhythmic chuntering with extremely distorted and quite painful vocalisation. Whilst the heaving, piston-churning industrial approach works happily with the sludgy death metal guitar, said torturous lyricism is quite unbearable on the second track, with the music being too banal to relieve the discomfort. Thankfully, a heavyweight production helps the 'Cause, but it's very much a case of pedestrian dissonance, and quickly reaches monotony after too many minutes in their company.

EROS NECROPSIQUE (Frs) - *Chernille Transparence* CD '97

ADIPOCERE RECORDS

The cover art suggests that this product is in fact a load of arse. That may be going too far, but there are many tiresome factors involved in listening to three-quarters of an hour of this. This is slow, lugubrious music with



limited orchestration and snatches of the female soprano used by **Elend**, sometimes ticked along by mildly exotic percussion. Though sharing with Mr Hasnaoui's compositions a religious leaning first hinted at by the "Jesu Christi"-chanted introduction and perpetuated through extensive use of synthesised pipe organ, the music is far more mundane and depressing than the Franco-Austrian neo-classicists. At best, hinting of insidious menace, it is a shame that so much of the music chugs along without undue variety. Not to mention the masculine vocal parts, which are sung with an almost nauseating psalmic reverence; lacking in colour and dynamics. In their defence, I've heard that **Eros Necropsique** have based their lyrics on Baude-laire, so they do have a case for being so downbeat and dirgesome. Their main problem is that their music comes close to ambient and is minimalist in many respects, and so an ostinato (that's a riff to you and me) is flogged to death so that even the best ideas - in the notable case of "Delirium de l'être seul" - are left tired. A good example of successfully building on a simple theme comes from the more optimistic and jesterlike "Reminiscence". More of this sort of thing would probably help their cause, and perhaps cheer themselves up a mite in the process.

ESPOSTOA (UK) - Calva Demo '97

This is the work of two men; Paul Gemmill and Mike Mayers (whose solo project **Zeus** is considered later on), the former being responsible for all the songwriting. **Espos-toa** (the drawing of a cactus on the cover might perhaps have something to do with the monicker) play mainly melancholic, but very doomy death metal with lots of credible 'proper' singing. Much of the way the music and vocals intertwine brings back memories of early **Cathedral** material, although the guys really push the pace on parts of "Black Phantom", where black metal might possibly have been an inspiration for the blasting parts. "Frozen Eyes" has a gently rocking main riff over which Paul's vocals (although sometimes tending overly to dirgesomeness) lend a suitably mournful feel. The title track features creeping riffs and reveals a strong awareness of melody. One principal detractor is the way the bare-minimum one-guitar/bass/drum instrumentation and the clear production mean the sound is too honest and thin. You could also criticise the slightly slack playing if you wished to be pedantic. Fortunately the twosome have managed to provide a clearly-defined mood and vibe to this recording, which is no mean feat for a new demo band in this day and age. £2.50 / PAUL GEMMILL, 14 MANOR GROVE, PENWORTHAM, PRESTON, LANCs, PR1 0QA, ENGLAND.



ETERNAL SOLSTICE (Hol) - Demonic Fertilizer CD '97
DISPLEASED RECORDS

Demonic fertilizer? Like ammonium sulphate? (NH₄)₂SO₄? No? More like slow - but not tedious - death metal with a vocalist hinting at Glen Benton and a drummer who needs more of a sense of rhythm beyond the 'oompah' patterns he thunders out (making the music clamber along in an ungainly and clumsily fashion). These Dutchmen have ground together a third album with a sense of character and direction but which chugs a little too geriatrically towards a rather withdrawn common end. Pulling out all the stops creates fun songs like "In the Year 2525"; which accelerates in a lively and almost catchy manner, gaining a lorryload of momentum in the process. There's also a smart title track, and some other meaty riffs to get your fangs into flung around the duration of the disc, but the sense of bludgeoning created by what is essentially basic music and simplistic drumming gives this release something of a childish air. Not that it's not good, since this rates above average for a death metal album these days, it's just a bit unchallenging. I'd rather be challenged, wouldn't you?

ETERNAL TEARS OF SORROW (Fin) - Promo '97
X-TREME RECORDS

My first experience with this band was a fun, rather childlike piece called "Bard's Burial" on the *Sometimes... Death is Better* compilation. A heavier approach is now apparent, at best sounding like a slower **North from Here** (**Sentenced**), with lots of double-bass drumming, mega-low vocal growl and feel-good guitar melodies. Spoilt a little by an almost kitschy edge, the talent nevertheless shines through with the catchy, bouncy *joie de vivre* of the excellent "The Law of the Flames". Things are let down by the last track; a chest-beating kind of anthem which isn't quite contiguous or as full of itself as the other songs. Overall, well worth tracking down the album.

EVERCRY (Swe) - The Passion, The Sin, The Punishment Promo '97

Wow, this guy sings like an angel! One of the three best vocalists I've heard in all the reviewed items, I'd go as far as to say. Here is truly great doomy wailing in a melodic vein that really suits the grandiose, windswept music. This type of heavy metal is for all those into the big, romantic picture expressed musically. A fitting accompaniment to tragedy, but not introverted enough for grief. The last song has hints of the atmospheric latent in **Anathema's** *The Silent Enigma*, and there can't be much wrong with that now can there? A substantial development from the *Timeless Aura* demo reviewed last issue and one to keep your ears peeled for; something this professional can't go ignored for much longer. £3 / NIKLAS BRODD, TJARNVAGEN 1 F, S-821 34 BOLLNAS, SWEDEN.

EVOKE (UK) - Dreaming the Reality CD '98
SYSTEM SHOCK RECORDS

After an age and the dissolution of the plans of an album release with the morbidly quiet Flashpoint Recordings/Leviathan, **Evoke** break

through their underground torpor and put out an album. Hooray! Well, actually, it's not all that exciting. In fact, it's not exciting at all. *Dreaming the Reality* is as heavy as a Sherman tank and has the production **Evoke** could but have dreamt of, but it's nought more than bog-standard death metal. No frills (aside from an odd synth), no nothing. This record isn't bad, it's just so terribly and hellishly boring that there is absolutely nothing I can extract from the full-length to write about. There's no point going back over old musical ground as unashamedly as this - I'm sorry but a handful of OK riffs just ain't good enough - and it would be even more banal of me to witter on about how monotonous and insignificant this really is. So I won't.

EXCITER (Can) - The Dark Command CD '97
OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Old school heavy-metal-cum-thrash with vocals in almost a high register as used by **Judas Priest**. Working to best effect in the short sharp riffing of "Aggressor", the heavy chuntering guitars of "Ritual Death" and the slower, over-the-top "Let Us Prey" *The Dark Command* is a confident-sounding record. While undoubtedly one of the better Osmose releases over the last year, that doesn't of course mean to say it is worth buying. Powerful and enjoyable yet unarguably very passé and on the odd occasion darn-right childish.

EWOC (UK) - Rampage Demo '97

Dean Seddon's band has, I think, now disbanded due to lack of commitment by other members, but not before this three song rehearsal was taped and sent in my direction. **Ewoc** also managed to get a few support slots up at Rio's with established bands, and from the evidence of here that wasn't wholly undeserved, although Dean's consistent work ethic obviously helped. The man's obsession with serial killers is the lyrical focus, while the music is more like open-minded death metal. By way of example, the drummer brings in some funk influence, I dare say, to the introduction of the very first song. Here you'll also find a wonderfully '70s wah-wah pedalled guitar, and a groove that few bands would dare to exploit on a death metal track. The rest of the music is essentially straightforward blasting, considerably hindered by the foggy rehearsal room sound, although I can hear some odd technical ideas thrown about here and there. It's a pity only ten minutes or so of **Ewoc's** existence was officially recorded for posterity. Ask Dean if he has any copies left. DEAN SEDDON, 68 SWINTON HALL ROAD, SWINTON, MANCHESTER M27 4BJ, ENGLAND.

EXMORTEM (Den) - Dejected in Obscurity CD '98
EUPHONIOUS RECORDS

Whilst **Exmortem** at least manage to faithfully replicate the elements that made **Morbid Angel** so much of a defining death metal act; the headache-inducing drive, unrelenting percussion, solid and dense sound, Satanic (and in this case narcissistic) lyrics, you know the rest; I still find this tedious. Reminds me of all too many death metal bands nowadays - you might have hitherto gathered - this should be for aficionados only. Soren Lønne's ultra-low gravel-throatedness could do with more of the occasional forays into Jeff Walker territory, and now I mention it the music could do with a lot more soul too. The biography supplied by Euphonious hints at a rhetorical question: "faith and dedication to this genre is [sic] nothing you can take away from them". Well is it not? Bands shouldn't be given too many points simply for managing not to succumb to acts of sacrilege against bygone classics. I'm all for recycling, but not in terms of music this banal.

FATAL (Fra) - Loin de Moi... en Moi Demo '98

Listen beyond the French accent acutely pushed to the fore of the recording and you'll find some enjoyable and non-Osmose-recyclable modern thrash. Great riffing - spoiled a bit by a rough-and-ready production (if that word is employable here) and something of a mechanistic feel - especially towards the end of the tape, makes for exciting, vivacious tunes with a good ear for melody and something of a black metal influence. I don't know about you, but it strikes me **Fatal** are better off when dropping their tiresome aggro-metal pretence and just letting it rock. It would probably not go amiss if I mention the synth and cello parts (*très belle* in "Le Versant Sombre de l'Amour") which don't do the demo any harm at all. I expect however most people won't be patient enough to sit through the overly high-pitched and stentorian vocals - more fool them because they are merely a distracting annoyance against the rather nifty *musique*. \$12 / B.P. 708, 76060 LE HAVRE CEDEX, FRANCE.

FINAL BREATH (Ger) - End of it All MCD '97

Promising death metal with a nice mixture of aggression and melody. The guys could do with a fuller guitar sound to complement the confident growling of this 'ere Jimmy. Having a silly cartoon for the cover art could do then harm in future as regards getting signed and not having to self-finance successors to this otherwise professional mini-CD. The powerchords create some impression, although their clumsy lyrical pessimism and nihilism is passé and depressing. Polishing up the guitar solos would be a good idea (or dispose of them altogether, they serve no purpose here). Still could do with more bite and in-your-face-ness, especially the latter half of the twenty minutes

which lacks both colour and the necessary power. \$8 / BERGSTR. 15, 97816 LOHR/MAIN, GERMANY.

FORGOTTEN SILENCE (Cze) - Thots MCD '95
OBSCENE PRODUCTIONS

Definitely deserving of heading their own review as opposed to being sidled into sharing the spot with **Agony** earlier on, **Forgotten Silence's** triumphantly acclaimed *Thots* is almost the dog's bollocks. Technical death metal with verve and dramatic elements, jazzy episodes with lilted high-hat, off-the-wall double bass drumming, it's all here. Don't be put off by all the jargon and technical razzmatazz, **Forgotten Silence** can be especially heavy and brutal when they wish to be, with dramatic growling interspersed with the clear cut female singing parts. If there's one thing wrong with the release it's a slight lack of direction and structure, but unless we see great things from **Fleurety** - and I fear they may have ventured off Planet Metal lately - this remains definitive and quite probably the ultimate arty death metal album in the last couple of years. One of 'em records you play with pride to your pretentious mates to show them death metal's not all about *Beavis* and *Butthead* idiocy. As a final thought: this Clara girl they're perpetually on about must be quite something too. \$5 (EUROPE) / \$6 (ELSEWHERE)

FORLORN (Nor) - Forlorn MCD '97
HEAD NOT FOUND RECORDS

Excellent Viking death metal with synth bombast used very effectively. One of the most promising new acts this year, if totally unoriginal in conception. Usually more of a black metal theme, this time the connection is Garm, who mastered the disc (pretty competently, although the sound is a bit dry) and Sanrabb from **Gehenna** contributing clear, strong lead vocals. "A Battle So Bright" has competent singalong male and female unison vocals plus effective flute, and combines these with catchy riffs to produce a full-blooded track. "Heroes" combines tumultuous raging riffs of maelstrom and tempest, with the music swaying majestically like a longship in the waves. "Ragnarok" finally bears the rhythmically driven pulse of the creative fore. Then there's "Drommefanger", an instrumental using the sleighbells-over-the-fjords approach to create a detailed musical scene. It's not all a bed



of roses; bits do sound like Sanrabb's band, and maybe a little of the synth is occasionally redundant. There's a blatant **Bathory** influence to the screams in "Heroes" and the background vocals (relating to the *Hammerheart* saga), but overall the riffs are just damn good, and lend to a rich, bouncy Viking flavour. This and the latest **Falkenbach** will take you all the way to Valhalla from the comfort of your stereo.

FROM THE DARK (NZ) - In the Last Days of the Sun Demo '97

Now that **Demoniac** have settled themselves into a ponderous middle-age in salubrious environs of West London, it seems that the black metal scene in their native New Zealand has a new pretender to the throne. This is surprisingly catchy yet rough-around-the-edges black metal with an annoyingly screechy vocal and some nice guitar solos. Enjoyable in the same kind of manner as the *...Northern Moon* **Behemoth** demo was, though not quite as convincingly performed. \$5 / JASON, 16 CANBERRA PLACE, TAURANGA, NEW ZEALAND.

FROZEN SHADOWS (Can) - Empires de Glace Demo '96

This demo was hastily and mercilessly crucified in *Mimes Brun* magazine, but I'm not going to follow suit. You know Odinn, one really must be careful to communicate the distinction between average demo quality black metal from utter shite. There's a gnat's arse difference between the two, I know, but *Empires de Glace* isn't that dreadful, surely? Sure, I could produce a better percussion sound from within my kitchen, and I'm sure Dani Filth wouldn't sound as bad as **Frozen Shadows'** vocal impression of his slow asphyxiation, but the demo is not altogether an ultra-fast mess. You see, err... there are some slow parts here and there. Mostly there actually, but it's certainly got more 'paced' sections than early **Immortal**. The synth is, typically, over-important and predominantly 'spooky' pipe organ nonsense. Actually one section sounds like a rip-off from *Bergatt Et Evenyr 1 5 Capitul* (it's even got the matching clean vocals), but at least they stole a worthwhile chunk, if indeed we are justified in deeming them guilty without trial of plagiarism. So, what's the saving grace of this one then? It's a good question, and come to think

HERMH (Pol) - *Angeldemon* CD'97

PAGAN RECORDS

Dramatic synth-led slow to mid-paced black metal from this strangely-named Polish act. Their synth is played in a different fashion to most, giving a deceptively original feel to the music. A more sinister **Old Man's Child** would be a workable comparison in that respect. Whilst there is little imagination in the actual synth composition, it often succeeds in creating an effective, horror-filled atmosphere, at other times leaves me rather unimpressed. An honest, clear production fails to hide the slightly loose guitar musicianship. The simple sense of foreboding works best on "Wolfish Flower", otherwise some blast passages and enjoyable drumming mixing moderately well with quieter sections. Genuine occult-orientated atmospheres that are created sometimes work very well, though they seem rather ambitious on occasion. It's worth listening to this for the idiosyncrasies; including the weird, industrial, double-bass drumming of "Dreamdeath Lover", and a great minor-keyed chord sequence in "Vampire the Angeldemon", making the thing as a whole better and more intelligent than most.



Helheim. Stop chewing chicken legs, and concentrate on writing music!

HEXENHAUS (Swe) - *Dejavoodoo* CD'97

BLACK MARK PRODUCTIONS I'd call this competent power metal based more on classy musicianship than real catchiness. S i n g e r

Thomas has a great pair of vocal chords which gives recollections of **Candlemass** to the grafting hooks

of "Nocturnal Rites"; a track with truisms such as "Everybody needs somebody/Independence is a lie" for lyrics, won't go down well with our beloved (or should that be benighted?) penguins, but it's a change. Some of the synth arrangements border on kitsch and the record does drone on a little, besides the memorable first track proper and the aforementioned ditty. Otherwise a half-decent CD with a likely broad spectrum of appeal. The usual faults, namely overdramatisation without subtlety and some nightmare vocals in "From the Cradle to the Grave", don't cloud the picture irreversibly.

IDEAS (Hun) - *Like a Forsed Withering* Demo'97

Oh, ever so close to being a good demo, this one. Their atmospheric and often semi-technical metal doesn't quite come off, perhaps due to excess keyboards swamping the background. Blame Ferenc Hamburger (I kid you not), **Ideas'** synth-player for that, but then his work does also enlighten sections of the tape quite superbly. An example would be the ambient feel to the instrumental "Our World", which is almost **Anathema** in construction and execution. "World of Our Dreams" has that waltzing 6/8 rhythm to which lugubrious, lazy melodies are delicately set, but at other times **Ideas** seem to be trying to be a tad too clever for their own good. The female vocals are sometimes jarringly off-key, but overall don't detract more than they add to the musical character. They could also do without some of the melodrama and vocal anguish, which go perilously over the top on occasion. \$5 (EUROPE)/\$6 (ELSEWHERE) / BOX 1258, TATABÁNYA, H-2801, HUNGARY.

IMPALED NAZARENE (Fin) - *Rapture* CD'98

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Incorrectly touted as a return to extreme black/death metal form, this fifth lashing of cyber-industrial metal is worryingly banal. Despite the chaotic and backward-leaning tendencies of the opening "Penis et Circes", the enjoyable snatches in the former half of the album, and Mika's inane lyrics, there is little here to note. More punk-orientated than anything else, the drumming is so standard and invariant, the riffs so boringly obvious, that even the otherwise unattractive final track surprises as slow and left-of-field. Without the synths and imagination of **Urga Karma**, **Impaled Nazarene** seem to be running on petrol fumes, long having drained the inspiration tank (or siphoning it off into **Diabolus Rising** and **Legenda**) of any explosive mixture. Done to death like this, music no longer becomes extreme, moreso the opposite. They may have got the catalogue number they sniggered after (OPCD 69), but there's not too much else to be proud of here.

IMPERIAL (Fra) - *Aux Crapaches* CD'98

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Not a good first impression created by the shite cover art and the photo on the back of two ugly and drugged-up-looking Frenchmen from what I imagine is a shitty alley somewhere near Marseille. The first impression is the horrific wasp-in-a-matchbox sound and the pisspoo production. It seems that this is unfortunately another retrotrash cash-in, possibly redeemed (though not wholly, by any means) by snatches of technicality and decent riffing. Lyrics in **Imperial's** native language do not sound as bad as that may look on paper, since the accent is all but lost in the barking and snarling. Very unimaginative and fast, mechanistic drumming which is credited to a bandmember, but sounds like a computer. Too homogeneous as a whole, whilst having interesting riffs and snatches thrown around the

disc, but it's not performed without conviction. What the hell they were thinking off with the distinctly strange final track, "Thrashers 13", I don't know. This intersperses the aforementioned elements with snatches of beach-fairground music and snatches of conversation. Prescribe in small doses unless heavily addicted to dodgy thrash, one can't help but notice Osmose is churning out a lot of second-class releases there days.

IN THA UMBRA (Por) - *Of the Singing Dusk* MCD'97

TRIBAL PRODUCTIONS

This was not as I imagined (i.e. black metal), but rather death metal with a couple of ears for melody and classical aesthetics. The latter is apparent in the final keyboard song (which is actually written by a session player rather than a bandmember), which is a beautiful baroque-style number. Otherwise **In Tha Umbra** produce memorable riffs but fall into the trap of using the keys much too blatantly. The third song, "The Swan", has an inventive tripping bass drum rhythm, and shows the Portuguese guys have a talent for spotting ideas off the beaten track and making them work. At a comparable stage in their embryonic careers to fellow countrymen **Moonspell's** first MCD on Adipocere, I doubt these men will face the same success - for one they lack the dramatics and penchant for exotic touches - but there's not much of a differential of talent between **Under the Moonspell** and this. **In Tha Umbra** can rightfully be looking to go places having stuffed *Of the Singing Dusk*.. (with its warts-and-all budget sound production) under their collective bulletbelts. A full-length should have been out on Art Music some time ago now.

IN THY DREAMS (Swe) - *Stream of Disgraced Souls* MCD'97

WRONG AGAIN RECORDS

A collection of genetic clones marked on the Swedish death metal chromosome were analysed and selected for genes which conferred listenability, aggression and a fine sense of melody. These clones were studied through molecular biological recombination and found to be closely linked to the **In Flames** gene on the same chromosome. While the individual clone was processed into a specific, high-quality product, it is likely that further mutations conferring greater individuality and more heavyweight vocal arrangement would be beneficial in maintaining the **In Thy Dreams** gene amongst other clonal NWOSDM progenitors.

INCANTATION (USA) - *The Forsaken Mourning of Angelic Anguish* MCD'97

REPULSE RECORDS

Downtuned and with subvocal growling straight from hell, **Incantation** mix dissonant riffs with dull blast rhythms and concoct some boring death metal from the mixture. The best thing about this is the **Death** ("Scream Bloody Gore") cover followed by the timewasting, extraneous industrial-sound-effect-riddled final track. My faith in death metal is tested once again and found wanting.

INFAMY (USA) - *The Blood Shall Flow* CD'98

QABALAH PRODUCTIONS

Unlike the press release writer, I don't think that being brutal death metal in the vein of **Immolation**, having a very silly Joe Petagno cover and being from Los Angeles make this release appealing. Despite the fact that this is not of insubstantial quality for the genre, this is of minimal interest. **Pyrexia** play a similar style so much better, without the naff lyrics and hackneyed **Necronomicon** samples. Give them a visit instead, you'll find them light years closer to what true death metal is all about.

INFLECTION (UK) - *Demo'97*

Sometimes I feel like a teacher writing end-of-term reports on these demo bands. It's so often a case of "could do better, but not without talent". Let's consider **Grimsbys Inflection**. The guys have allowed their ten-minute, three-song effort to reach me second-hand, and I can only be telling them to keep at it. As things stand, they play slowish death metal with one or two reasonable riffs but bugger all else of interest. The last song here is the most promising, but they will have to work on that horrible bass drum sound as well as on a general tightening of their musicianship. SAM TAYLOR, MALMESBURY DRIVE, GRIMSBY, LINGS DN34 4TR, ENGLAND.

INTERLOCK (UK) - *Demo'97*

Romford's **Interlock** provide something very different. Something like industrial death ambient with classical influences, I would say. How fun it is to bundle bands into ill-conceived and arbitrary sub-genres! Anyway, the industrial element is the boldest factor in the music, while avantgarde persuasions manage to twist the music in contradictory directions on every other song. Just looking at the colour demo cover demonstrates the artiness of this bunch, so don't expect the scientist here to deal with it comfortably! The first three songs are the most inaccessible; fast drum machine rhythms with deep, gruff vocals and the occasional sample. **Synthesiser leitmotifs** provide the fleeting glimpses of melody, while the dark atmosphere is maintained by the guitars and basslines. "Floodwater" is more slow and gothic, with more classical interplay. This more grandiose approach brings out the most in the band, but it is not until the concluding "Coda" that we see a different - and perhaps more impressive - side of **Interlock**. Here, clean, almost quavering vocals feature prominently with lady singer Siân's complimentary tones in what could almost be an idiosyncratic hit single. The song's slow, dark, mournful groove is effective and moving. Surprisingly, this demo was recorded on a four-track, but the sound quality is nothing short of superlative. £2.50 / JOHN, 46

HALL ROAD, CHADWELL HEATH, ROMFORD, ESSEX RM6 4LJ, ENGLAND.

ISVIND (Nor) - *Dark Waters Stir* CD'97

SOLSTITIUM RECORDS

What a lot of black metal bands there are, I wonder which one we shall be meeting next? Aha, **Isvind**. Arriving in a precipitation-lashed blackstorm of **Darkthronesque** proportions, it doesn't come as a surprise to know that **Fenriz's** lot are the major influence. The dubious production doesn't matter during the memorable "Ulv! Ulv!", which pivots effectively on one of those **Isengard**-derivative folktrifs that will have some dusting off their air guitar, amidst some commendable songwriting. **Isvind** climb down the Beaufort scale quite nicely on one or two occasions, and were it not for the quieter moments all could well have been lost in the frenzy. Raw and unpolished music, here with a warm yet brittle tone, works well here but soon tires. If the airy synths at the end of the 52 minutes had been absent, it would indeed have been hard to stay for the final curtain due to the heaving of my eyelids. There's a nice woody melodicism in many songs but shorter songs and better vocals would have helped.

KEEP OF KALESSIN (Nor) - *Through Times of War* CD'97

AVANTGARDE MUSIC

Suffering under a slightly distant production with lots of reverb on the sparse and weak vocals. The guitars are messy on the trill riffs and the rather obvious synth seems to be groping for atmosphere, but it sometimes works. The rhythms are too obvious and formulaic, often very fast and repetitive, creating not much more than disconcerting background music. "I Choose to Suffer" has a certain ethereal mood, but fingers will be pointed at the pointless, continuous double-bass drumming. There are some rather trippy, odd-rhythm snare hits, making certain sections of the album sound on the trancelike side of boring. Still, we have the down-to-earth "Obliterator", which doesn't really suit the band and their chosen brand of passive, almost languid black metal. The aggression too often collapses into a monotone of depression. The fourteen-minute long "Nectarious Red-Itch", includes a composite extra track jammed on full-speed followed by a horrendous screeching hacksaw vocal and some twisted piano synth. Odd, and not in an altogether pleasant way; **Keep of Kalestin** aren't really special - or good enough - by Avantgarde's normal standards, a label which recently has exhibited a tendency to spread itself too thinly.

KHEPHRA (Ita) - *Khephra Demo'96*

In this day and age, substandard black metal demos should be smacked very hard. Bands (like this lot) who use wind-machine introductions should be smacked very hard again before being subject to manifold torture. Since **Khephra's** brand of blackness is boring and inconsequential, I think we can line them up as doubly guilty. While at the best, the Italians sound like early **Abu** at their worst (and even so, without the breaks and technical parts), their music is one-dimensional and yawningly boring. Commenting on the half-decent standard of playing would be fatuous in the light of their childish, uncomplicated music. Just guitars, drums, bass and some quick-to-mid-paced, semitone-riffing dullness. Nothing more than that. Thumbscrews please! RICCARDO CERANA, VIA MAZZINI, 52, 21057 OLGiate OLONA (VA), ITALY.

KNELL ODYSSEY (Spa) - *Sailing to Nowhere* CD'97

GOLDTRACK RECORDS

Power metal reminding of a mostly slower, though much less competent **Angra**, replete with a high alto vocalist on which the music relies on to a handicapping degree; his warbles being taken into consideration. "Invisible Horizons" is a great melodic song with catchy hooks that does survive the vocalisation by merit only of brute strength. Seeing as this is clearly the most enjoyable song on offer, even the more than average cohesiveness of "Eyes of the Child" isn't quite up to standard, it fares well against the lacklustre, poor quality latter half of the disc. The synth is often babyish, and, while functional to some extent (as in the well-arranged layered introduction), it is a little too pervasive and intrusive, leading to a lack of six-stringed rhythmic backbone. The effect of this is to make all too many of the songs seem directionless and sterile, building slowly to a plateau that never actually arrives, let alone any sort of climax. This, along with the lightweight production and curiously vacuous sound, leaks confidence from the band's music. **Knell Odyssey** could perhaps be boosted by an expansion of the furtive hints at ethnic musical inspiration apparent on the odd occasion. Come on España, get your act together!

KRAKEN (UK) - *Alone Demo'97 / A Man's Gift to Himself* Demo'98

Wahey, another lot with a KT postcode! A one man project bound to interest me since the bloke concerned; MJ, used to work with the ex-screamer from the defunct **The Tragedians**. The more recent effort considered first; this is a strange blend of synth, buzzing guitar and varied vocals creating an effect somewhere like more-adult-orientated black metal or likewise, due to the fast drum machine rhythms. The singing for one is remarkably capable and perhaps too tame for the music, which only

is nearly as sweet as Sara Svensson of **Oxiplegatz** fame (or infamy depending from whence you look). Nevertheless, strong songwriting and melodic proclivities ensure **Macbeth** mercifully avoid being abandoned with the self-indulgent, melodramatic powercut metal that their record sleeve would otherwise recommend. Despite a squeaky clean production and ever-so-slightly inappropriate synth noises, the band manage to produce delights such as "Thy Mourning Lover"; where the child-like vocal melody (again, despite off-key singing) is utterly captivating. If you can tolerate one dodgy ballad and hanker after a more feminine side to metal, then this is definitely a feasible option.

MARDUK (Swe) - Nightwing CD'98
OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Divided into two parts, the latter being a concept based on the life and times of Vlad Tepes Dracula, however historically inaccurate (or not) that has turned out. The first half - coming after a white noise intro - is heavily reliant on power, speed, and dark powerchords, with Legion's gravelly deep throating throughout, sounding most effective on the outro; an enjoyable drum march with vocal narration. Black fucking metal without synth intervention and done as best as can be done in the back-to-basics paradigm. Questionable for long-lasting appeal, but good as occasionally catchy, frenzy-inducing whirlwinds of hate, riffs that are effective but not inspiring. Perhaps this is a piece of zeitgeist for the late 90s black metal scene; will we look back at this in ten years time and say, "Is this when black metal wasn't fun anymore?" The later tracks tend to slow down a little, but are not otherwise significantly different. The re-recording of "Deme Quaden Thyrane" shows off its great monster of a slow riff over the beginning and conclusion. I still prefer albums of the ilk of *Those of the Unlight*, this high-speed Norsecore is increasingly meaningless nowadays.



**Black as the Devil
painteth - Moon**

MASTER (USA) - Faith is in Season CD'98
SYSTEM SHOCK RECORDS

Master? They're supposed to be cult, yeah? Been around since 1983 apparently. Well who cares; all I can hear on *Faith is in Season* is low-end forgettable thrash metal with tonsillitis-encumbered vocals. Maybe one of the tracks grinds along contentedly, and maybe there's an uncharacteristically melodic and beguiling outro, but this promo disc can go throw itself out the window for all I care. And if it lands in a wheelie bin, so much the better.

MAYHEM (Nor) - Wolf Lair Abyss MCD'97
MISANTHROPY RECORDS

Utterly crushing, dark and chthonic, **Mayhem** blast into this with a pace inhumanly propelled by Jan Axel's tremendous drumming, which slows only periodically. "I Am Thy Labyrinth" swirls nihilistically; Maniac's pitched screech accompanied by languorous wailing creating unearthly black atmospherics. Indeed, the white-noise industrial intro hints at the feel of the rest of the MCD, an almost mechanistic and technological fear obliterating all hope into violence. Rather than musical, *Wolf Lair Abyss* is a black fog-wall of twisting riffs, the only songlike track being "Symbols of Bloodswords"; uncompromising brutality in a straight-to-the-point structure. "Fall of Seraphs" comes close to the crepuscular chill of *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* and although "Ancient Skin" parallels one of the classic offerings from that breakthrough, the darkness of that era passed with Euronymous' death. "All the stars in the North are dead now", after all. **Mayhem** 1997 is just pure destruction, and (unfortunately) doesn't pussy-foot around on extraneous matters.

**MELEK TAUS (Swe) - Expulsion from the Realms of Light -
Encarded by Fire MCD'97**
NEAR DARK PRODUCTIONS

Teräy - the guy whose stolen demonic sigil adorns the credits - sounds very lonely, or so you would guess from the simple effectiveness of the desolately melodic introduction and conclusion to this little disc. The former will be recognised by underground aficionados as from the *We Unite* demo. The middle two, more conventional tracks are a little more cheerful, especially the title number which works upon a simple yet mildly devastating chord sequence. Luckily in the current climate, synth chords are very much in the back seat, and to carry the metaphor, tightly buckled up. The best thing about **Melek Taus**, likely not the case of the eponymous peacock-devil beloved of the Yezidis, is the strength of the ripping vocals, which nicely stride the growl/scream dichotomy without loss of focus or power. There's nice use too of echoed diction in the aforementioned intro, among other places. Certainly holding its head above the sea of mediocrity, this is however unlikely to compete seriously the current black metal scene. A pity, since the maturity of the synth parts and genuinely strong songwriting demonstrate this is a commendable piece of darkness. (\$12)

MEMORY GARDEN (Swe) - Tides CD'96
HEATHENDOOM MUSIC

Certainly a relief in an age of diffident musicianship, **Memory Garden** know where they're coming from (*Candlemass* environs) and they don't make any bones about it. *Tides* keeps one step ahead of plodding, and with the aid of more-subtle-than-expected drum-work, generally keeps the land of Nod at arm's length. "Trapped at the Pharoas" [sic] has a singalong, youthful chorus, whereas "Judgement Day" trails regally from the speakers in slow stately

arrogance. Much of the heathen pride rides on the clarity of Stefan Berglund's vocals, which ride the three-quarters of an hour largely unscathed. Clearly the choir practise all those years ago did come in useful, Stefan. The **Garden** do bump up the tempo and get things going with syncopation, double-bass drumming and more tried-and-tested methods, but somehow I feel unsatisfied. Still, I'm sure stronger songs will come with age, if they haven't come already that is, and this is miles less irritating than umpteen randomly-selected doom records. Finally, bonus marks for pulling off the tricky, smoochy "Blissfull" [sic] without dropping it into a crevasse of kitsch.

MENTALITY (Slo) - Promo'97

Grindcore with synths didn't look *that* bad on paper, and when I heard the pleasant swathes of keyboards on the pleasant introduction (something of a Charmand Grimloch lurking here), hopes were raised. Not for long though, since Slovakian oddball act **Mentality** decide to largely desecrate their passable death metal with washes of uncensored synth weirdness. The stuff works best when the keys are left floating in the background behind the guitars, but this is rare, and all too often they distract and detract from the overall picture. On one occasion, things descend to an almost *Teletubbies* level of inanity, with thoroughly infantile synth melodies and unearthly, incoherent babbling vocals. The grind itself is unstructured but far from awful, with dual-pitched vocals and other novelties, but they're going to have to keep their keyboard player away from the drugs cabinet on their full-length, which **Mentality** are hoping to unleash on an unsuspecting public anytime now. c/o JAN HONC, F. STEFUNKU 14, 03601 MARTIN, SLOVAKIA.

MEPHITIS (Ire) - Blinded Demo'96

Here's a band whose music is the sort of death metal you can take home to your parents. Indeed, these are probably lads whom a girl can take home to meet her parents and be certain sparks won't fly. *Blinded* reminds me of the sort of music the English underground used to be much more adept at churning out in sufficient quantity, stuff like **Gomorrh** comes close I guess. Gentle and thrashy for a death metal band, with simple melodic techniques and everything just taken very steadily. There aren't any frills here, and that undoubtedly will bother a few. I however would not choose to write this off as anodyne, boring music, since it works better than most bands who try to fly before they've learned to crawl. The vocals are slightly incongruous, being ever so slightly Swedish and snarling, but the production is good, the Weird Al Kurtagic cover art is decent enough, and it's all pretty much 'there'. Needless to say, **Mephitis** doesn't throw up anything new, but then - without wishing to appear patronising - they know their place and are not meaning to be ambitious. JOHN RATTIGAN, MONASTERORIS, EDENDERRY, CO. OFFALY, EIRE.

A MIND CONFUSED (Swe) - Anarchos CD'97
NEAR DARK PRODUCTIONS

Aha, a Swedish five-piece death metal from Haninge. Very weak and poor (perhaps rushed) Sunlight Studios production though, not half as good as that of **At the Gates' With Fear I Kiss the Burning Darkness**. Unfortunately the music isn't going to see that milestone challenged either. Depressive and melancholic in a way reminiscent of early **Paradise Lost** without being striking or remarkable. The slightly technical death metal looks good on paper, and comes with a wonderful album cover, but the tunes lets you down in practice. Over-distorted guitars drown out most of the atmosphere and is further agitated by hoarse vocal screaming. There's a slight improvement nearer the end, when slower songs emphasise the more melodic ideas on show. Overall though **Anarchos** is too docile and is afflicted with a disturbing lack of focus. (\$16)

THE MOANING (Swe) - Blood from Stone CD'97
NO FASHION RECORDS

This release's ability to punch through my general apathy of Swedish death metal does say something I suppose. That the youngsters involved in **The Moaning** are doing this with their debut effort is definitely impressive. Although a little middleweight, *Blood from Stone* boasts both youthful exuberance and determined drive. The Abyss production leaves things a little high-ended and blasting drum sections sound more cymbal-crashing than powerful. A slightly fantastic Wählin cover and the jolliness of the music is typical of many of their countrymen's approach circa the late 1990s. Using melody and hooks to effect; "Dying Internal Embers" has more of a slower, groovy feel to it that shows diversity but is not totally my thang. "A Dark Decade's Rising" starts itself by widdling more frenetically than a **Sorhin** track before generating some excellently rocking bouncy bridge parts. Finally, "Dreams in Black" manages to capture a magnificent mood somewhere close to where **Dissection** used to walk. Definitely from the higher echelons of Swedish fresh-faced newboys, I wouldn't mind paying the higher taxes over there if it meant helping these guys out.

MOON (Pol) - Daemon's Heart CD'97
PAGAN RECORDS

Continuous half-hour double-bass drumming onslaught from **Vader's** Doc coming over a synth-rhythm section. *Daemon's*

Heart peddles an enjoyable, intense, and aggressive approach with satisfactory production, spoilt only slightly by the clear comparison with the vocals of Cezar's mother band; **Christ Agony**. Simple riffs dominate with minimal synth interference in the way of pretension or superfluity. Short doses of this project are fun, but continued exposure tends to pummel the brain into indifference, although it is at least powerful and focused. Pummelingly depressing and uniform, complete with a redundant introduction, more than a 30-second melodic passage in "The Curse", **Moon's** debut provides nothing more than another derivative and ephemeral outing into violence.

MOONSPELL (Pol) - Sin/Pecado CD'98
CENTURY MEDIA

Whilst initial listens to this deemed it as little more than big-media-friendly, this did grow on me; songs such as "The Hanged Man" and "Masquerade" definitely demanded my attention. A rich, layered production is taken for granted, but the weak point of the whole release are the vocals; at times aimless and not powerful enough. Whilst "13" has an almost kitschy feel, the synth drums when used are enjoyable and better than expected. After the introduction's industriogothic overtones, tracks like "Second Skin" and "HandmadeGod" are not much more than ear candy, offering as they do little in the way of bite. The *Wolfheart* guitar tone is still there, but not in the in-your-face way it was before, and there's a tribal fixation demonstrated by "Abysmo" that we haven't heard on *Irreligious*. Otherwise, the pretentious Mediterranean feel of "Flesh" contrasts with the warm, libidinous iconoclasm of "Magdalene". Meanwhile the diffuse, atmospheric impotence of "Eurotica" is as good a reason as any to pull out of the EU, let alone the single currency. It's really a question of how much you can tolerate the tired heaviness of songs like "Mute" and its silly effects, as opposed to songs presenting scope and dimensionlessness of the choirs in the annoyingly-titled "Let the Children Cum to Me" and the slow, regal, seductiveness of the epic "The Hanged Man". There's none of the hunger of *Under the Moonspell* here now.

MORBIK (Ind) - Now, I'm Bleed MCEP'98
ALUZZA PRODUCTIONS

Seven songs (?) of Indonesian grind/blasting death from three guys all of whom thank God first in their sycophantists. This doesn't seem all too congruous - unless I am missing the joke - with the full-colour glossy inlay cover, whose front depicts a gun victim of Monrovia with the top of his head shot off. It's certainly more graphic than the *Dawn of the Black Hearts* cover, though without the latter's hype, so that should see some scuttling around for this. Unfortunately the music is plagued by a dismal production with everything totally lost. Not to mention the down-tuning meaning guitar strings probably hung off their instruments and got tangled or confused; I thought it was a twisted distorted intro when the first song kicked off. Even by grind standards then, the music is not memorable, with only one moment interesting in the slightest. It's not all that appealing that the guys have gone for a great professional presentation (which they've managed to have got banned by the authorities) and forgot to write the music. \$7 / BOY DARMAWAN, KOMPLEK DEPLU JURANGMANGU TIMUR, BLOK A1/12, RT 001/06, PONDEK AREN, TANGERANG 15222, INDONESIA.

MORDUM (Slo) - Systems Demo'95

Christ, I must have had more Slovakian demos than anything else this issue. Still, there's nowt to complain about with this sporting a quality production and colour cover. May I suggest they make their sound a bit less stodgy, as their death metal tends to feel like it needs its sinuses drained on occasion. Otherwise, this is often interesting stuff with hints of technical and melodic parts. **Carcass** cropping up in spirit on at least one occasion. It all adds up to make some heady death metal with a definite personality, although there is bigger all useful I can say about it. Apart from the fact that it's a shame the female vocals only made a cameo appearance. If this had been really bad I would have made a joke about punning the bandname with "boredom", but there you go. \$5 (EUROPE)/\$6 (ELSEWHERE) / KOROSI ROMAN, LESNICKA 7, KOSICE, SLOVAKIA.

MORGENGRY (Cze) - Love with Hate Demo'96

Slightly weak and subdued doom/death lumbering under an insufficient production is what we have here. Once you explore beyond the colour cover, **Morgengry** don't seem such an entertaining experience; there's too much extraneous soloing and a general lack of quality songwriting. Jindra's vocals aren't the best, and some of the guitarists' backing vocals are truly dreadful. In fact, the band are probably at their best when they cut the vox and the powerage altogether (those whining, vexatious guitars are one of the most effective turn-offs in metal demos, and they're large and in charge here). The instrumental "Graveyard Elegy" makes for a really sweet and unassuming ending. There are one or two memorable hooks and some worthy riffing in "She Died for Fullmoon" [sic], but on the whole *Love and Hate* is lacklustre material, especially in the context of the blossoming Czech scene at present.

of the time spent listening to this, although it could as well be just about any well-established, smooth black metal act. Left to spin, the CD churns out fairly bland (but unarguably professional-sounding) stuff, and I can only surmise that a lot of the magic - found in abundance on the first and second albums - has died.

ORDER FROM CHAOS (USA) - Stillbirth Machine/ Crushed in Infamy CD'98/ An Ending in Fire CD'98

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

So *Stillbirth Machine*, originally released on Wild Rags in 1992, then bootlegged by Decapitated Records, is now released on Osmose with the *Crushed in Infamy* 1989 demo tagged on the end as a bonus. Said label have also released the unaired (due to the disintegration of the band after guitarist Chuck Keller absconded to spawn *Vulpecula*) final album *An Ending in Fire* with a Morrisound mastering, both CDs being held in our faces as two important pieces of history.

Cursory earlier listens to the band's first effort had me musing whether Pete Helmkamp's lot would be better of if they took a hint from their monicker and created some order out of the chaotic morass. Thus distortion, swirling death/black rhythms and downtuned bleeding guitar strings do much to put me off this style. Only snatches of the only demo track present ("Blood and Thunder") contain memorable riffs, where Pete's voice actually strives for that little something called melody. Otherwise, grinding aggression pummels clumsily over the 36 minute duration, leavened only by Helmkamp's monotonic guttural roar, which impresses at the level its rapid machine-gun delivery.

The demo is more straight-down-the-line, with greater clarity especially in the vocal department, and ironically seems the more commercial release, despite the slightly detrimental sound quality. The dirtiness is very much still there, but there's a little more to chew on. Moving on to the final CD, which is unquestionably the best of all three releases, *Order from Chaos* had acquired a maturity which meant the songs were actually structured and perhaps slower than previously. Together with a growing intellectualism in the lyrics (we're talking pig Latin), it seemed to mark a sophistication to which

particularly nauseating. While there are foundations the guys from Alicante can build upon, the record is too far flawed to be enjoyable. Furthermore, sheer density of records of interchangeable description mean this is practically redundant.

PANDEMIA (Arg) - Prana Sem-piterno CD'98

ICARUS

These guys use soprano female vocals, keyboards, a violin, a flute and Indian tablas in their hour's worth of "progressive" death metal. One of their tracks is even supposed to be structured like a tango. I really wouldn't know. I do know that none of the novelties above manage to remotely conceal the fact that *Pandemia* couldn't write a half-decent song if their families' lives depended on it.

PARADOX (UK) - The Outsiders Demo'97

Ooh look, a Xian band with an inlay message full of the self-righteous repressed sadism and nonsense that pisses me off about the deathcult. *Paradoxically*, their music is not much good, denying their paradox in the claim that this 'Christian' band can play 'good' music. Vocals are like an institutionalised Lee Dorrian in the first track but later settle to a slightly more bearable growl. Music is sadly retrogressive death/doom without any good riffs or melodies and a fatuous and dissonant synth. The tape actually comes with three blood-painted nails, but who cares. We know better than any that the Devil has all the best tunes.

PHANTASIA (UK) - Sensual Demo'98

One of the more name-dropped bands of the wiling English scene, Chris Carter and company here fail to live up to my great expectations. The music is desperately different, but not for good reason; the vocals are both horribly high-pitched, unpleasantly accented and filtered through distortion, while the synths used only convey something of a futuristic vista on what comes closest to dark or black metal. Three of the four songs take on this approach, *Deinonychus* coming closest to a comparison in relation to the actual scope and feeling to the music, except that this is not melancholic and is far weirder. Probably the aforementioned similarity is down to the use of the drum machine, which sounds artificial but is at least used at a variety of paces, and the swirling synth morass filling out all possible spaces within the songs. The odd-man-out, "Pleasurebitch" is more of an industrial track replete with scratched-record samples and other things that are far too devoid-of-metal to be analysed here. As you may guess, I'm not too happy with either this track or the often 'out-there', repetitive approach of many of the others. What I can positively state is that not only is the sound quality top-notch, but the general quality and musicianship-standard of this demo is very high. The final instrumental song, "Sensual" for instance, professionally and successfully rides a mournful and powerful groove. More of this certainly wouldn't go amiss. £2 + SAE / 11 SHERLAND COURT, THE DELL, RADLETT, HERTS WD7 8JG, ENGLAND.

PHANTASMA (Slo) - Jazz for Jesus Demo'96

Further to the interesting demo title, the bassist of this Slovakian four-piece calls himself 'Jesus', and they have a song named, "I Trust in God Only". Never fear, one glance at their silly lyrics will confirm that they are indeed being ironic. This is an obscure mixture of brutal death metal and more progressive melodic elements, and the concoction is both baffling and vexingly directionless. It seems ambitious to mix one of the most extremely languorous and brutal growlers with what at times comes close to fusion death metal (though nowhere near jazz itself, more like a sympathy for the ideas *Neglected Fields* are into), and it basically doesn't work. Of course, there are neat ideas on show, such as the unusual female harmonised vocals in the aforementioned track, but the keyboards are too sci-fi-sounding and are often just damn woeful. Admittedly the poor production (but decent sound quality) doesn't come to their aid, but if they are to build on their strengths, *Phantasma* need an urgent injection of focus into their musical cauldron. \$7 / P.O. Box 73, 040 11 KOSICE 11, SLOVAKIA.

PHLEBOTOMIZED (Hol) - Skycontact CD'97

CYBER MUSIC

Very much appreciative of the death metal idiosyncrasies of these Dutchmen's *Immense Intense Suspense*, I would have dropped *Phlebo's* drummer Lawrence Payne a line regardless of the quality of its progenitor. As it turned out, I could scarcely have been disappointed, and when said bandmember returned my interest eagerly accepting my offer of an interview and expressing surprise that mine was only three the band had ever received from England, I didn't think twice about spending quality time preparing a detailed questionnaire for him to complete. I have not heard anything since his first letter, and the manner in which he bemoaned the lack of commercial success for the band (despite obvious - if off-the-wall - musical ability) and the fact that I have seen rare few magazine features on the band, make me suspect that this band has a certain apathy for the media. I may of course be wrong, things get lost in the post I know, but



it was annoying anyway and I berate him for discourteous behaviour if my letter did reach him.

Thankfully the music on *Skycontact* speaks well for the band through the musical medium. Now far less huffing and puffing is involved; much more of a rocking melodicism is involved in *Phlebotomized's* post-death metal. Mixing graceful freeform rock with mock-classicism and almost progressive elements, the eight tracks and the hidden song found at the start of the disc à la *Masquerade Infernale* flow remarkably well, while retaining the odd structures that appealed on previous records. The last four tracks are linked together by a theme that is passed from guitar to synth and then to violin, and is then subject to variations - not the most economical use of music, but the ostinato itself is simple and powerful. The production of the album is strange yet well-suited, giving the music a large stage to play on, which goes down well with the epic, open-air atmospheres evoked. The music shifts from powerful, low-ended death with Dennis Geestman's customary grunt of over the top, to a much quieter, low-key approach. Managing to express a variety of sentiments, though spoilt minutely by over-instrumentation, this is an impressive, if esoteric effort. The childlike gentle conclusion the album is a thoroughly uplifting ending to a much underrated release.

PROBOSCIS (Swe) - Stalemate CD'97

DIEHARD MUSIC

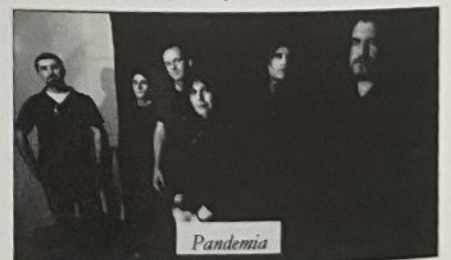
This was the first promo I received after the deadline for stuff in my second issue had passed. That was in January 1997, and I'm typing this in July of the following year. That sounds like procrastination, rather than *Proboscis*, eh? Ahem. Still, I have my excuses.

Anyway, this is death metal/hardcore crossover, a release whose aggression is deeply infectious. Some of the music does though revert to torpid, depressive slowness on occasion, which does not endear it to me. Luckily, there is also an element of bizarre to the band which elevates them above the level of ordinary. Thus, the basslines sometimes seem to derive from early *Primus* (no bad thing in my book) and there is a similar affinity for strange time signature changes, notably in "Now and Then"; which uses a 5/4 riff to great effect at its end. Still, let's not exaggerate that, this is still primal music that does not get strangled in its overcomplexity. One shouldn't turn a blind eye to this otherwise inconspicuous effort.

PROFANUM (Pol) - Profanum Aeternum: Eminence of Satanic Imperial Art CD'98

PAGAN RECORDS

Ho-hum. Fairly entertaining instrument/orchestral black metal in the form of a one-off release. No guitars, just drums (artificial perchance?), orchestral synths and a grim vocal adding up to create slightly hollow-sounding atmospheres. Mock-film score music such as this tends to be 'musakal' and uninspiring, only the last track has a workable theme *per se*. Still, there is no superfluous guitar as with most black metal music in the style, but this is not as tightly focused as it ought of be. Certainly nothing special, 33 minutes of scary, vampire film music that traipse



heavily together with the muddy feet of the mediocre.

QUO VADIS (Can) - Forever CD'96

Quo vadis? Oh, I don't know, probably out to Canada to hear four guys string together some decent death metal. I don't know exactly where they come from but I'll probably hear their bass drums far too high in the mix a long time before I get there, so we can head towards their machine-gun impersonation. Anyway, that should be forgotten when we get there; you know I've heard they play powerful, yet tuneful death metal with a hint of introspection and related acoustic tranquility ("Nocturnal Reflections") I think the songs called), so it should at least be fun for a few hours. I've a notion they've got themselves a violin too, so that should be interesting. However, this kind of thing can hardly be revolutionary, so we'll just down a few beers and then head back. Just before though we'll be serenaded by that nice Sabrina girl who sings on their last number, t'would be nice if she was brought in earlier. I can't see why they don't think of that. Oh well, it should be at least be better than a dull night in front of



even these filthy Kansas City bastards could aspire. Plunging occultism into the same vat as stellar physics, they came out with songs like "Nucleosynthesis" and "Tenebrae (Oracle: Gnosis Spermaticos)", but never could quite endear me to their cause. The first song rocks like a beast, but nowhere else could I find the satisfaction I desired. The refinement of their black/death just wasn't demure enough for my tastes it seems.

OUIJA (PLACE YOUR BETS!: 8/11 Spa, 10/1 Bar) - Riding into the Funeral Path CD'97

REPULSE RECORDS

Why does every band have to use Joe Petagno? I don't really rate the guy that highly anyway. As you can see, Repulse don't want to reveal the country of origin, it seems Dave Rotten is paranoid that the act is labelled as not from a North European country and therefore not get enough attention. Their first black metal signing is unfortunately let down by an *Impaled Nazarene*-styled introduction and a second-rate production. The musicianship isn't bad, there is a clear *Cradle of Filth* influence to the vocals, the arrangements and the silly pretentious "oohs" and "aahs", together with whispering. *Ouija* have learnt the elementary black metal syllabus in melodic atmospherics, but their sloppiness ain't exactly shaking the ground. Luckily, the synth revolts from falling into the trap of being the aspect propping up the core of the music. Silly maniacal laughter and a staged thunderstorm are very amateur tricks nowadays though. Those rousing passages of passionate madness need better vocals, which as they are almost veer into self-parody. I jotted down an *Abzu* comparison somewhere or other in that respect too. Not unenjoyable, the tongue-in-cheek (I hope) photo, and the comic song titles ("Before a Possible Relapse") are certainly amusing without even considering the disc. The final ninety-second hyperblast is immature, and I dare say most people won't have enough patience for this as a whole. That means I probably won't have any patience for it. No, this does grow on you a little, but elder, 'genuine article' Norscore is more interesting.

OVERLIFE (Spa) - Between Madness and Passion CD'98

GOLDTRACK RECORDS

Why do all Spain's musicians play either brutal death or power metal? Why do all their vocalists sing out-of-tune? Why does Goldtrack send me all this stuff? This and other questions confound me, but I've got a record to review here. Well yeah, Leonardo Martinez' vocals are the worst side of this otherwise bearable listen. Their semi-falsetto high-pitched warbling mean that *Overlife* sound a lot healthier when he keeps his trap shut. That's because the musicians in the band deserve a respectful description; as well-played and often technical material this is. The ten minute epic, "Victims of the Holocaust" certainly has its moments, and "Dark Side" has some neat riffs, but then they go and demolish all the good work with one of those customary self-indulgent ballads, and let me tell you this one is

the TV, eh? VOMIT PRODUCTIONS, P.O. BOX 44, STATION NDG, MONTREAL, QUEBEC, H4A 3P4, CANADA.

QUORTHON (Swe) - *When Our Day is Through* CDEP'97 / *Purity of Essence* CD'97

BLACK MARK PRODUCTION

Since all the EP songs are on the double-album, let's consider the whole lot together. However amusing you find it that the one-time godfather and primary influence of the black metal scene is now peddling little kitsch pieces of rock called things like "Cherrybutt and Firefly", I could at least take Quorthon's latest endeavours partly seriously.

The double album consists of basic rock songs borrowing from Britpop and metal in equal quantities. The songs are technically redundant, since they consist of very similar ideas, riffs and rhythms, but that ole Quorthon guitar sound is still there.

The singing is one of the better aspects of the performance, while the lyrics are severely questionable; those of you sensible enough to have read *Isten* magazine's *Dark Lord* episode might remember something about previous of his penning. Anyway, there is certainly more maturity in the prose here, although the subject matter seems to be limited to Quorthon's recompenses towards a life of beer, metal and girls (surely not that many of the latter?) and various numbers about sex, not being able to sleep, and all the standard rock clichés.

Interestingly for all those Aryan Viking proud out there, Quorthon admits in the song "Deep" that he is a sucker for dark brown eyes in the not-so-fairer sex. It's just like looking into their ass, isn't it Vikernes? Most of the songs are listenable, and the odd couple are downright catchy and upbeat, one example being "I've Had it Coming My Way", featured on both the single and the double-album. More of that could have saved this effort, but I doubt many of you would be that pleased with his new direction. So, unfortunately, the boredom grows, and after half an hour my motivation to continue paying attention has all but dissipated due foremost to a lack of ideas on Quorthon's part.

RADICAL (Chi) - *New Blood* MCEP'97

Late 80s thrash with a bass-heavy sound and a vocal that goes way beyond its means and consequently OTT most of the time. There are more than your average share of good riffs here working horror, instrumentally reminiscent of *Tormentor* on occasion. Too many sexual swear words used in the lyrics, which are concerned with child sex abuse, drugs and religious corruption. The strange accent makes them damn hard to follow at any rate. A pleasantly laid-out tape defied by a murky production, *Radical* display competent musicianship but the simplistic songwriting never really pushes at greatness. The punk influence is clear on "Nothing is Like it Seems", which has a meritable riff before the song loses all direction and goes into slug-out mode with distorted guitar. Unpolished stuff, but the hooks of the last song, "My Skin Turn into Bone" (sic) show promise. There's a compelling need to refine the solos, vocals and trim the superfluous, since the first song falls out-of-time and does not create a suitable impression. MIRAFLORES 249 31-A, SANTIAGO, CHILE.

RAGNAROK (Nor) - *Arising Realm* CD'97

HEAD NOT FOUND RECORDS

Yargh, total black metal! Well, this isn't totally old-skool black metal, if that's what you take from the preceding sentence. It is fairly basic stuff, with skilled use of keyboards here and there, and it is tiring to listen to carefully. When they do play up the synth parts, things tend to be so much better, the music filling out and attaining a much less banal and much more mystical quality. The introduction is a fine example of what can be done with this kind of orchestration, and "En Verden av Stein" uses a melodic riff and embellishes it with keyboard work. That song is one of the best, but is piped to the post by "The Fall of Christianity", which builds itself up to a ghostly, melodic climax and creates something of a majestic soundscape. The rest of the music is far less enlightened ("God is Wasted" as a songtitle exemplifies that), and is strangely coarse and thin-sounding. Due to this prosaic red-rawness and the more melodic sections of the release, I would imagine this could appeal to a broad spectrum of black metal aficionados.

RAIN FELL WITHIN (USA) - *Solemn Days* Demo'98

A precocious lot from Virginia are *Rain Fell Within*. Daring to play atmospheric light metal at such a young age, you see. The cruellest of

fanzine reviewers would call this boring, but I think credit and a degree of respect are due to a band that can make this stuff sound reasonable and certainly far from disastrous. Not much goes on in their five songs; there is a demand for intense concentration for me to hear what they are getting at. Vocalist Dawn's soprano is almost breathtaking on the introduction, but is tragically off-key on the odd occasion and thus instantly shatters the spell. The way her vocals are harmonised nods towards the likes of *As Divine Grace*, although she has (and they as a unit have) a lot of work to do if they want to be up in the brilliant blue with the Finns. The backing keyboards and percussion are relatively unobtrusive, and the more metal elements in their sound are kept firmly in check despite the occasional rougher moment. As the demo progresses, so my attention wanes, and I really think *Solemn Days* could do with more of a structured approach if it didn't want to pass people by. The band's presentation and professionalism seems top-notch, so they'll just have to keep plugging away at it. Finally, I can't think of the last time I saw a black guy in a metal band too, and we've got one here on the drum stool. So there you go. \$5 (USA), \$6 (ELSEWHERE) / P.O. BOX 222713, CHANTILLY, VA 20153, USA.

RESURRECTURIS



RAISM (Fin/Gre) - *Aesthetic Terrorism* CD'98

KRON-H

Twelve songs of thrash metal techno weirdness from Lutinen and Daoloth. Five of these songs are actually remixes of the original seven, but manage to sound quite incomparable. Mostly reasonably interesting; a good metal riff surfaces at the end of the title track and there's a sprinkle of *Septic Flesh* in another,

but this is about as metal as it gets, machismo aside. The black metal vocals will put off as many techno fans as the thumpin' bass will dissuade the die-very-hard metallers. Most tracks clock up about 185bpm and work around a good idea; unfortunately over-embellishment often make the whole caboodle sound silly. If in doubt, simplify. "Hate You" pounds along at 210bpm and so I believe qualifies as gabba proper (if you care), bound to go down well up North (as allegedly gabba does) with its garbled vocals and a siren wailing throughout. With half of the songs ditching the guitar altogether, many people could see this release as ultimately of curiosity value only. That said, I prefer it to the latest *Impaled Nazarene* record anyway.

RESURRECTURIS (Ita) - *Corpus* Promo'97

It is a shame that this does not impress me considering the demo of the previous year was so promising. *Resurrecturis* seem to have lost some of their charm in the process of becoming more stripped down and capable of courting established record labels. There's no soul left in the brutal vocals, and the drum machine (and I'll be damned if they can fool me that there's a human there rather than a set of printed circuits) sterilises the overall picture. I can see that they've been listening to their *Vader* records, as there is now a considerable parallel to be drawn with the legendary Poles. That's not necessarily a good thing however, if you have no personality of your own. Full marks however for the complete change of style in the song "Midnight Letter", which is streets ahead of the other typical death metal attempts at being atmospheric and moody. A lot of it is down to the effects which transform the vocals of the guitarist's better half (or sister?) into something more ambient. Otherwise, there's nothing new to see here. CARLO STRAPPA, VIA MEDAGLIE D'ORO 73, 63023 FERMO (AP), ITALY.

RESURRECTURIS (Ita) - *Nocturnal* CD'98

DIAMOND RECORDS INTERNATIONAL

And here's the full-length; the Italians' persistence having paid off in the form of a deal with a new Dutch label. They've even invested in a video as well. Some of the promo tracks are back here, along with others that attempt to cover everything from grind to atmospheric death metal. Thus, "Dark Moods" is a worthy stab at atmospherics, though it struggles under poor male and female vocals, while "Born Defeated" is a minute-and-a-bit grind thing. Alongside the slightly irksome drum machine, it's the singing and forced shouting that spoils the broth, with some of it really suffering from red-hot-poker-up-the-rear-end syndrome. Otherwise, it's a reasonable if inoffensive record; good, catchy machine gun riffing in "Abisso Notturmo" (they don't entirely spurn their native language) and a surging track that pivots on an attractive, widdly hook in "No Dreams Allowed". With more maturity and a less lifeless production, we really could be getting somewhere.

REVENANT (Ita) - *Demo*'97

BEYOND... PRODUCTIONS

An extremely treble-skewed production almost pulls this demo off into unlistenable territory, especially bearing in mind the often high-pitched six-string melodies these boys tend to go in for. The vocals are some of the most bizarre I've heard, ranging from sheer guttural intensity to wispy wraithlike shrieking, but frankly the overall sound-picture is not cogent. Musically at worst ambulatory deathly metal with none-too-imaginative drumming, on the other hand the best and final track has an

impressively catchy hook sandwiched by atmospheric acoustic segues. \$7 / VIA AL PONTE REALE 2, 16124 GENOVA, ITALY.

RITUAL CARNAGE (Jap) - *The Highest Law* CD'98

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Osmose finally stumbled upon the ultimate late-90s thrash album, and it's not even from the most obvious place. *The Highest Law* shows them all how it should be done: a really meaty production, vicious powerchords and an awesome vocalist. Ten short and energetic blasts of apoplectic heavy thrash metal with a very Satanic (in the *Venom* sense of the term) lyrical edge, and an (admittedly lacklustre) *Onslaught* cover, "Death Metal". "Servant of the Black" has those evil *svartmetal* nuances bleeding from its tight musicianship, and "Master" would have been a classic had it been released not so long ago. Sweeping the floor with all those *Infernö* and *Gebennah* losers, this is a contemporary album with the old vibe much intact; they even start their songs with solos in that old style! Only half an hour long, but that is definitely enough for the guys to do the damage, and do it with some class.

THE ROCKING DILDOS (Fra) - *Harry Hit Parade* CD'97

KRON-H

I believe Osmose's own Hervé himself once played in this band, which would perhaps explain the growing domination of these pseudo-rebellious punky releases on his labels. Personally, aside from some good rocking death metal/punk riffs in "Toilet Seat Sniffer" and "The Raincoat Brigade" (these guys don't bother with the muscle-shirts or the corpsepaint, it's strictly raincoats-only), this gets tiresome very, very quickly. The barking vocal style (and it has to be said, the music in general) is readily comparable to contemporary *Impaled Nazarene*; no great thing in my book. Really, there's only so much fun you can have giggling over songtitles like "War Against Feminist Fucks" and "Teenage Cunt (That's What I Want!)" Perhaps 5 seconds worth, being generous. Steer clear unless you're very punk or very rich (or both together, which is maybe less unlikely than you might imagine).

ROTTING CHRIST (Gre) - *A Dead Poem* CD'97

CENTURY MEDIA RECORDS

Never taken with *Triarchy of the Lost Lovers*, aside from the odd gripping track, my expectations were not so high on receiving this promotional plastic sandwich in my mail. After many listens I can report that I was partly pleasantly surprised; Sakis and the boys have gone and combined a more commercial rocky style of metal (and if this still qualifies as black metal - by virtue of the band's roots - then it marks the tamest possible end of the spectrum) with stronger, more epic tracks than

Ruination



surpassed on 1996's *Triarchy of the Lost Lovers*. Sakis himself, vocally unhindered this time, manages to contort his unique growl into something much more audible, and although this sounds forced at the worst of times, it suits the music much better than it should seem to do. The standout track "Out of Spirits" achieves its elevated status through a larger-than-life chorus and carefully-placed, deadly synth. Whilst the majority of the songs are extremely conservative in terms of recognisable structural verse/bridge/chorus elements, the sound is still thin and some of the workable riffs are spoiled by being too staccato and lacking in flow. This effect becomes increasingly apparent due to the relaxed tempo at which the *Christ* are employing here; some of the songs really are slow. That said, the arrogance of tracks like "Between Times" combined with the powerful stomp of "Semigod" bring to bear a musical maturity that few can hope to match. The small matter of whether the guys have 'sold out' is a consideration for the individual listener. Admittedly the new material is both less extreme and less obscure than early recordings. *Thy Mighty Contract* won us all over with its defined, fiery bite, but that was never a record whose description could ever realistically be termed 'brutal'. The same guys years later haven't exactly compromised their style; it's more of a mellowing process, and one that should be taken in context next to the chameleon-like guile of *Moonspell* et al on the very same label.

RUINATION (Lit) - *Visionary Breed* CD'98

GOLDTRACK RECORDS

Thankfully sparing us from yet more half-baked power metal, Madrid's Goldtrack Records have seen fit to release *Ruination's* debut. The five lads have come up with some rocking death metal with some of the stonerisms that would hint at the doomer moments of the deceased *The Blood Divine*, neglecting the atmospherics. Despite my customary aversive Pavlovian response to such jolly decadence, *Visionary Breed* has the clear-sightedness to include lots of melody and stirring, invigoratingly cheerful harmonised riffs as found on "My Life, My Cross". How-



ever, the vocals seem either over-growled or sung clean with too much dreariness and without the necessary conviction or, let's be frank, natural ability. Interestingly, one of the songs starts with a riff that is almost a dead ringer for the opening of **Onslaught's** "Welcome to Dying". In the past I have been accused of over-fairness, and for good reason. Here, there's no reason to parade this disc (the music often loses itself in its own obscurity) nor is there one to bin it. And I'll forgive them the indulgence of concluding this album with forty seconds of quite dire Lithuanian-folk-cum-country-music. Do it again guys and you'll see I can spread blacker, more corrosive bile from my pen.

S.C.A.L.P. (Rus) - Through Eternity MC'97
REST IN PEACE PRODUCTION

Senses Calming at Dead's Lament Places. Just expanding the acronym if you were interested. Anyway, I suppose S.C.A.L.P. should be rekindling embers of romantic longing in those with a thing for reasonably progressive but relaxed diet death metal. For me though, it's all too constipated and the guys seem to be trying too hard. Desolate atmospheres are created by the emotionally lonely, simple melodies, with soft keyboards adding gentle touches here and there. Lack of funds have resulted in a highly unsatisfactory production, which often reduces the music to a pathetic (true sense of the word) level. Landscape-lovers S.C.A.L.P. can't be among many bands who have played an acoustic track with drums, but their main problem is that the music tends to drift hopelessly and aimlessly nowhere in particular. Rizhenock's clean vocals are basically fine, but his growl makes the sound harsh and one-dimensional. More development and a bigger production, I hope, should have this lot coming up smelling of roses. NOVOSILSKAYA STR. 10-39, OREL 302030, RUSSIA.

SACRAMENTUM (Swe) - The Coming of Chaos CD'97
CENTURY MEDIA

I would have preferred this band if they had stuck to the old formula. I mean it's all very well to simplify your sound, but if you at a stroke obliterate everything that made you special in the first place? At the **Gates** did that and look what happened to them. *Far Beyond the Sun* was never a mind-blowing debut album, but some of the layered guitar melodies were something special, and the songs generally were far better than the stuff they have produced now. Nine songs which wash off as dry, partly due to the production but mostly due to Nisse's serene, high-pitched growling. Starting off with "Dreamdeath" and "As Obsidian", we are treated to a couple of well-written songs which are powerful while never being wholly satisfying. Many of the other songs don't have strong melodic qualities, and the blasting which the drummer reverts to doesn't really get to you like it should. "Abyss of Time" is a very tired-sounding instrumental which drones annoyingly, while the title track closes the album with white noise and vacuum cleaner sound effects. Neither of these aspects are at all necessary and utterly fail to give the impression the boys should want to give: of being a larger-than-life, dynamic black metal band. In short, this album never rears its head above mediocrity, or at least doesn't keep it there for long enough. You'd be far better off listening to **Swordmaster**.

SADIST (Ita) - Crust CD'97
DISPLEASED RECORDS

Last time I heard from these Italians they were playing technical thrash with something of a neo-classical edge. That was quite a long time ago now, and due to the positive impact that they had on me then, I was quite excited at the prospect of listening to *Crust*. However, it seems the Italians have hooked onto the pervo-sex craze infiltrating the scene, and now they have significantly dirtied their music and lyricism. Thus we have "I Rape You" and "Perversion Lust Orgasm" for songtitles. The music has been contorted in a way that makes them sound as though they are playing sloppily, but it certainly suits the atmosphere well. The clever use of synthesizers bears light on more futuristic aspects of thrash, perhaps with hints of the industrial approach. Instrumentals such as "Holy..." display highly impressive keyboard arrangements and novel vibes. There are many memorable tracks here, perhaps most notably "Christmas Beat", and the band have certainly found a dusty niche on a new annexe of the whole pomometal music out-house, and have furnished it well with their knowledge of musical theory and orchestration. Probably **Sadist** (now living up to their name more than ever) could now be accurately termed a more lecherous, twisted **Samael**, both musically and lyrically. Can't wait to hear the next one!



Sartinas

SADNESS (Svi) - Evangelion CD'98
MYSTIC PRODUCTION

The S/M styled cover art actually put me off straight away (I'm so offended). Even more so when the 'play' button releases an unpalatable amalgam of goth, metal and sexual sound effects, horribly dissonant and 'catchy-in-the-wrong-way'. The man's vocals sound like a hybrid of Islamic prayer-chanting and constipated howling. These do not violate the rest of the shiny disc though, since there are only four songs, before two remastered earlier ones and a remastered 1990 demo track. The newer ones seem to want to sell more records whilst the older ones mix bouncy doom and its melancholic spinster cousin, most effectively with the choral female vocals and string section. There is a clear swath of elder **Samael** (again!) to parts of these earlier tracks, particularly vocally, mixing well with the piano melodies of "Danteferno". The last, demo track sounds like old **My Dying Bride** as regards the guitar and vocal divisions, before a

change to male moaning destroys the comparison as the song loses its footing. **Sadness** were clearly best in their mid-period; "Tears of Sorrow" dives from a quiet, seductive melancholia before violins, drums and female cooing combine to initiate French sweet-nothings and depression punctuated by bassy, bouncy rumbles. It's the terrible "Mr. Faust" from the new material that encapsulates this deterioration; terrible whining vocals vomiting Francophonie accents, the new style just isn't natural at all. The MTV-video-clipped "Heretic" has modulated natural at all. The horror-music outro of the four new confused songs. Once the horror-music outro of the four new songs has closed proceedings you wonder what happened to the band that produced the later songs. The new stuff sounds like **Sadness's Cold Lake**. (\$18)

SARTINAS (Swe) - Demo CD'97

SHADOWS OF MICHELANGELO PRODUCTIONS

Typical of their nationality, **Sartinas** warble. There's good melodicism in the frisky death/black metal played here, and the production doesn't let them down too badly. Otherwise this is just another copy of the over-propagation apparent in the Swedish scene. Total meltdown approaches... (\$5 (USA)/\$6 (EUROPE/LATIN AMERICA)/\$7 (ELSEWHERE))

SATURNUS (Den) - Paradise Belongs to You CD'97
EUPHONIOUS RECORDS

Alright, a Danish **My Dying Bride!** Well, fair enough; they are more metal perhaps than our favourite English doomsters are, but here we have the style, excellent songs and dreamy romanticism, corrupted only slightly by slightly over-languorous songs and occasionally dodgy vocals. The whole caboodle clocks up almost seventy minutes, and so simple division means that the nine songs are predominantly long 'uns. Great packaging, although the cover photography of a deer carcass in the snow doesn't quite fit the mix of religious iconography/iconoclasm and lovey-dovey grandiose dramatics. Anyway, it all oozes style and class in a way that so few bands even strive for these days, and the Peter Brandes photographs inside are great too. The first three songs are probably the best, and use stately doom/death riffs with Thomas Jensen's excellent growl and classical synth accompaniment to conjure magnificent, desolate, yet inconspicuously beautiful sound-pictures. There are a couple of more dozy, pastoral flute and cello instrumentals in the middle of all the metal, one of which is tarnished by **Withering Surface** members' vocal contributions, the other being very much a summer-in-the-long-grass piece of atmospheric. And only those who are totally bereft of heart will fail to be deeply touched by the eloquently simple lyrics and slow, stirring romanticism inherent in the beautiful "I Love Thee". All in all, one of the best records of 1997. It seems that amongst all the trendy goth-metal artificiality, there are more classical, emotional albums firmly rooted in metal.

At the risk of ending on a sour note, it would not be amiss to point out that I endeavoured to obtain an interview with **Saturnus**, but due to the complete ineptitude of their label's Peter Mesnickow - who promised much and delivered little - questions were sent but probably never reached the band. Damn you Mesnickow for wasting my time. The question is whether someone can rescue **Saturnus** from this man's clutches.

SCULPTURE (Por) - Like a Dead Flower MCD'97
ART MUSIC

More wimpy music that will inspire Necrodevil's **Infernó** to plot against their next release. Narrative intro precedes rather laboured, slow, melodic doom. *Like a Dead Flower* sounds a little thin and lacking fullness. Tedious-sounding guitars of a distinctly demo-constituency drag behind a melodramatic vocal which would have better been expressed as

a growl. **Sculpture** sound too pathetic without enough of the passion they wish they could possess, everything's almost dirge-like. I've heard a lot of demos like this, and thus a label signing is too early. Nothing appears to grab you back for more, it's just half-cooked sadness without spice or flavour, and even the odd interesting riff sounds too bare for real effect. A lack of conviction, not musicianship, means I don't want this in my CD tray any longer.

SEER'S TEAR (UK) - Previous CD'98
GOLDTRACK RECORDS

The name has been in the backburner for some time, thanks mainly to Russ Smith keeping the flame alive. After a brief dodgy period, the Yorkshiremen are back with a full-length of being the lynch pin holding it all together. Avoiding limp-wristedness, Mark directs **Seer's Tear** through what the cynical and churlish would term easy-listening-metal, and what we

should refer to as a fresh English-sounding record. The Academy Studios production kicks off with the melodic freefall of "Prelude", a brisk number oozing levity and freshness. "1.13 a.m." is an abstract piece of distortion with drum practice in the background and (backward?) distorted vocal effects, ending with an alarm clock ringing. The dancing fretwork of "Pressures" nods to the not-quite-jazzy fusion of folk influences that gently tilts the release down the end of the great **Skyklad** et al. Thankfully skirting the edge of the execrable hippy doom trend that has worryingly gained ground over the past year or so, there are also hints of a rustic, round-the-campfire atmosphere somewhere in the brew. The two-part "A Chronicle of a Destiny" begins with synthesised oboe, and goes on to flirt with off-the-wallness in such a way not as to fall flat on its face but to gain character from the coquetry. With gracious form and direction, **Precious** appears a minor gem from the spawning English scene, though put into a broader context it is not admittedly spectacular.

SENTENCED (Fin) - Frozen CD'98 promo tracks
CENTURY MEDIA

Suicide-rockers **Sentenced** continue on their happy-go-lucky path to mainstream success. These two examples sound similar to the *Down* material; strong pieces of songwriting with Ville Laihiala's vocals taking the brunt of the melodies, which are nice but offer nothing rousing or special. I find the difference between the upbeatness of the music and the lyrical approach a bit disconcerting, personally. I'd far prefer to get the blues in the company of **Katonia's Discouraged Ones**. Or rather get manic with the lads' own *North from Here*.



SERENADE (UK) - The 28th Parallel CD'96
DEVIATION RECORDS

One of the oldest CDs to be reviewed here, guitarist Fraser sent me this while I was haranguing him to sell my second literary miscarriage from his esteemed *Golden Lake* distribution service. The first few listens were somewhat bewildering; seemingly unconnected strings of progressive riffs integrated into fairly complex arrangements, and then constituting a concept album about Christopher Columbus' voyages (which is in itself actually not bad at all). Subsequent listens have ingratiated me a little more to their cause; this is generally well thought-out and employs nice touches - such as the Spanish-style guitar during the introduction, and the great riffs in "Homeward" - but the grand plan execution has substantial flaws. Firstly, I dread having to say this, but Scottish clean singing just doesn't lend itself to lyrics concerning Spanish expeditionary. It wouldn't be so bad if they weren't so heavily accented, and I know the off-key



Seer's Tear - Got yourselves an original photo, but are you feeling silly yet?

that John wavers into doesn't help, but they're just not aesthetic. Whoops, there goes all diplomacy with those north of the border. I can only hope you hate Englishmen enough already. The vocals are, in fact, almost the death knell of the whole enterprise, because John's other influences include Glen Benton and Chris Barnes. Now his death growl would suit, shall we say, a grindcore band, but here it often just doesn't work at all. Moving swiftly on, musically things are brighter, although as mentioned before the whole thing doesn't really hang cohesively together. While there are certainly good songs, such as the instrumental "Beyond the Mist", which uses skilled atmospheric and relaxed, sunny melodies, much of the rest simply sounds like a long jam-session, and sounds self-indulgent as a result. Julie Ballantyne lends her skills to the quintet not with vocals (gasp!) but with cello, piano, synth and Hammond organ flourishes. These are employed powerfully and often lend a heavy 70s feel to the proceedings; if I knew more about the genre I would say that it was those bands that are the major influence here, rather than death metal or whatnot. Perhaps this is the reason I preferred their more straight-down-the-line split CD with **Harmony** the year before. Get the vocals sorted and you're halfway there, because the playing skills are present for all to see. It's just a shame I'm not totally sure I want to be taken that direction (how about a William Wallace concept album guys?)

SETH (Fra) - By Fire, Power Shall Be MCD'97
A.M.S.G.

Acoustic intro à la *Thousand Swords Graveland*, followed by basic, clumsy yet half-enjoyable black metal. Rather like a first drunken coitus, it is badly timed, and the next day you would be hard pushed to remember any of it, let alone a climax. Maybe **Seth** borrow from the brothel of second-rate, overused black metal riffs? The Polish connection is strengthened by the strumming reminiscent of **Behemoth's Sventevith...** Often plodding with obvious synth lines in the obvious places, the sub-Norsecore (Polcore?) zips past you without making you think or even stop to think. But it's better than some, three ten-minute tracks punctuated by immature synth rambling.

genres. The rhythms involved swing from very fast to slow and funky, with instances of more commercial Techno beats. "The Science Club" brings in mind **Goldie** with its more ambient, diffuse vibe. An array of carefully annotated documentary samples accompany the sporadically too-drenching feedback and (**Katonia** convergent) lonely leads; mostly concerning sinister experiments in which radioactive substances were introduced into people's bodies without their knowledge (especially ethically dubious in the case of retarded children and pregnant women). The overall **Soundscape** is harsh and frightening, and demonstrates (and OK, not totally convincingly) the potential of using left-of-field arrangements and fast, chaotic beats to create tense, intimidating atmospheres. £1.50 /

STIFF MINERS (Rus) - Vox Celesta CD'97
TBA RECORDS/VOICES OF WONDER

An industrial/classical work similar to the last **Master's Hammer** but presenting less in the way of zaniness and variety of approach. A very deep baritone vocal accompanies military march type brass section with Teutonic lyrics and shouted nationalistic-sounding hand-clapping, flag-waving folksy passages. It even sounds like they are talking about *wienerschnitzel* in "Orbis Tertius". Aside from the Latin message on the CD reverse side and the apocalyptic cover picture, this is minimalist stuff. The rhythms vary from quasi-techno/drum 'n' bass to **Beastic Boys** to sub-jazz. Orchestral tunes are industrially welded into the music's backbone, with both vocal and more classical samples. The mix often results in bathos, as in "Dorum Nonen" when an epic, classical ostinato is reduced to trumpet farting. Some sinister, futuristic Orwellian-type soundtrack would be a possible description - who knows (samples of crowds roaring)? Slightly baffling as an entity, and complete with psalmic chanting, I wouldn't dream of buying it. Better than **Beherit's** latest couple of outings though.



SVARTSYN (Swe) - The True Legend CD'97
FOLTER RECORDS

This would be another one of those anti-productions Garm was on about. However, I have my doubts as to whether these guys actually wanted it that way; everything is so buried in the mix that only after minutes of listening does the racket yield discernible music (then sometimes - quite out of the black - you hear one cymbal *very clearly*; most odd). It's more a case therefore of *no* production, rather than an anti-production. Anyway, the actual music isn't terrible, when you can make it out, raging Swedish black with a hint of **Setherial** to the riffing at times. The vocalist sounds peculiarly like a demented, very angry baby, but, as is the case with the most extreme blackness, that - surprisingly - doesn't turn out to be a hindrance here. Suffice to say there is nothing new here, it's mere black metal xeroxing, but then so is half of the stuff reviewed this year. In its defence, this is actually listenable, but negates the reason for the invention of CDs and their associated players; it would sound the same recorded on wax disc. I should point out the guest appearances: female vocals and keyboards in trace amounts. Not bad for obscurantist undergrounders, but next time guys, do your listeners a favour and use a recording studio.

SWAN CHRISTY (Gre) - One with the Swan CD'98
BLACK LOTUS RECORDS

Comparing this piece of pretentiousness to one of Lloyd-Webber's famous musicals would (of course) be insulting to Sir Andrew, but I hear these Greeks have tried to produce something of a rock musical-cum-opera here. Piano and violin plus directionless female vocals fail utterly to take this concept album onto a level higher than forced theatrics. While instances show **Swan Christy** (what kind of a name is that) coming up with interesting ideas, the crude guitar mix completely negates the half-decent clean vocals and the songs end up as laughable parodies of what the guys hopefully were aiming for. Dragging sluggishly towards its conclusion, the three-quarters-of-an-hour duration of this album seemed an eternity for me, the music - while its component parts are not especially bad - is powerless, boring, embarrassingly trite throughout, and cretinously melodramatic on occasion.

SWORDMASTER (Swe) - Deathraider MCD'98
OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

Three songs *de novo* and two covers on this neat little mini-album. The former, particularly the first couple of tracks, are fine exemplars of get-up-and-kick-arse death metal; catchy, powerful steamhammering songs pummeling you with Whiplasher's caustic vocals grinding gravel in your skin as you lie dead. Particularly meritable is the interaction between the pure moments of heavy metal melodicism and the thrasher sections. The covers (there are two more on the vinyl version) comprise a messy - if nothing else - grindcore-inspired song and an excellent rendition of **Roky Erikson and the Aliens'** "Stand for the Fire Demon" as a great moody, slow death metal exhibition of theatrics. The **Masters of the Sword** can devastate equally at slower paces, and I sense a possible avenue of exploration there. Whiplasher and company have turned up one of the very few products worth buying from Osmose over the last year - an aggressively self-confident snatch of coolness.

SYSTEM OF A DOWN (USA) - Promo'98
AMERICAN RECORDINGS

Hmm, a package from Columbia Records addressed to me, I must be moving up in the world. Or not. Anyway, to many this provides ample examples of why the mainstream metal scene circa 1998 isn't worth a fig: adolescent shouting as well as those execrable **Korn** whimpered lyrics, technological/digital riffing and a lack of substance

and melody in general. However, the first song "Suite-Pee" (geddit?) does have a nice bounce to it, and there's even some latin samba-style drumming in the other track ("P.L.U.C.K.") while the singer shouts "Revolution - the only solution" over the top. That's hardly enough though, and the moronic pseudo-anarcho-political sub-**Puissance** apocalyptic nonsense spouted on the promotional flyer tells its own story: "This **System of a Down** is unavoidable as life on this planet becomes unnecessary." I'd like to rephrase that: **System of a Down** being unnecessary with today's increasing amounts of trendy, Rick Rubin-produced, American trash-mag bands becoming unavoidable." Fuck off!

TANDUS (Ma) - Promo'97

This was good, chirpy and lively thrash until the vocalist opened his mouth. And that happened within the first minute. Fortunately for **Tandus**, one soon grows accustomed to its irritations, and respite arrived in the shape of an instrumental track at the end. The four tracks are rough without sounding like no one gave a shit - either at the performance or demo production level. They could, alas, have gone without the solo parts, but this isn't abysmal for developing metal from a developing country. Write via the Small Budget Productions address.

TARTAROS (Nor) - The Grand Psychotic Castle MCD'97
NECROPOLIS RECORDS

Silly title, silly music. Good enough for recruitment into the **Emperor** milieu, mind you. *The Grand Psychotic Castle* has baffled me every time I have played it, almost never have I been able to take it completely seriously, there's that element of circus music to the synth, perhaps **Hammer** horror stuff too, like some crazy ghost train soundtrack. That said, credit must be given to this sartorially aristocratic bloke (Charmand Grímloch) for creating that kind of feel in the first place. It just all seems a bit overdone; the synths swirl together and often manage to weld merely a spooky droning, rather than the makings of a good song. The last track is one of the best, with nice riffs and such like. Indeed, when the music is most traditional it works best, often taking on something of an *As the Shadows Rise* feel to it. Strange stuff, but not nearly as good as some would have you think.

TEASANNA SATANNA (Por) - Diabolical Hallucination MCEP'96
HIBERNIA PRODUCTIONS

Christ, I had an awful nightmare last night. I dreamt that every single cassette in my possession suddenly metamorphosed into a cassette-EP from this obscure black metal band from Portugal called **Teasanna Satanna**. It had unendurable animal-screaming for vocals over this chaotic mess of an excuse for music. When that was over there was some perverse synth improvisation (the guy's pet monkey was presumably loose in his bedroom) and then - *Gott sei dank!* - I woke up. As I rinsed off the cold sweat in the shower afterwards I realised the most horrifying aspect of the whole nightmare. This was the fact that the band in question was not *one* demented bastard's solo project, but a whole *bunch* of them all in it together!

THINE (UK) - Journeys MCEP'97
BLACK TEARS RECORDS

Excellent couple of tracks here, the **Isengard/Storm** comparison validated by Alan's Nagell-esque crooning and the magnificent folksy riffs, often topped by Lucy's vocals. The bassless Academy production sounds remarkably good; very clear and extremely powerful on the rare blast sections. Otherwise the music swings from dreamlike calmness to raging violence with maximum drama, and considerable construction of atmospherics in the absence of too much keyboard intervention. The songwriting here is very effective, with aforesaid dynamics never conducive to boring tracks (which are long), and the guitar melodies infectiously catchy. The direction the band are going in today - though I have not heard the album yet - seems less to my taste, but on the basis of this it will nonetheless surely be interesting. Don't see the similarity between the Gylve projects as anything less than a compliment, indeed Alan and company often beat those acts at their own game. Highly commendable.

THE THIRD AND THE MORTAL (Nor) - In this Room CD'97
VOICES OF WONDER RECORDS

I've never really dabbled in this Trondheim bunch before, for me they were simply the sideshow to which beautiful Kari Rueslatten used to attract attention. Not being able to ignore them anymore, I slip on *In this Room* and resist the urge to doze. 'Concentrate', I tell myself, and it will be easier to review this tricky piece of art metal. It's hard. Many times did the relaxing and wonderfully soporific strains soothe me near to sleep. And **Divine Grace** beguile me with their airy err, graces, these people "Myriad of Peep-Holes" hints at the woe-filled vocal harmonies of the aforementioned Finns, **The Third and the Mortal** go and mess it up with radio static in the background, presumably sophisticated. Well no, the tongue's in the cheek again. My brain's are oozing out of my ears trying to cope with this as well, but don't you worry, it does happen occasionally. Aside from industrial pounding at the end of "Monody", witness the added vocals on "Sophisticated Vampires" (no, *not* Dani and his lot) and the incredibly angry shouting in "Did You". This

isn't all a bed of roses. "So Pure" is more like **Portishead** meets cocktail jazz, and is successful as well as ambitious. I like these folk best though when they just do their thing, and come out with work like "Sleep", and have the sense to arrange it as the last song on the disc. That's just fine by me.

TORMENTOR (Hun) - Anno Domini MCEP'96
NOCTURNAL ART PRODUCTIONS

If you don't already know the story, this was originally released as a demo in 1988, and was resurrected by Nocturnal Art and licensed to Mystic Production. If you're even more ignorant you might need telling that this tape is of serious cult appeal in the death/black metal underground. It's interesting to remark then, that much of this tape is filled with obscure, chaotically fast thrash (often in obscure and seemingly truncated songs) with Attila's vocals merely complicating matters further. So, where's the cult appeal then? Well, there is the fact that this is of course the very Attila who sung on the classic *De Myteris Dom Sathanas*, for a start. Secondly, there are some seriously caustic riffs on show, notably in "A Gate on Hell" which take (and give out) a lot of beating. However, the third and most significant reason is the magnificent "Elizabeth Bathory", where all the strands link together quite magically; Attila's vocals oozing raw sexual evil, synths spinning that atmosphere of primeval darkness and a total killer of a piece of songwriting. Definitely one of the finest songs in the death/black subgenre, it's a shame the rest of the release is much less noteworthy, but it still beats off most of the pretenders today.

TOTAL MERZBOW (Jap/UK) - Merzbow Mixed Total MCEP'97
STERILISED DECAY PRODUCTIONS

Lee Edwards sent me this, asking me not to "mindlessly slag it off". It's good to hear that Lee has confidence in his releases! Anyway, there's not much I can say; this is the famous Masami Akita's rendition of the raw materials of one Lee Bower (of **Skullflower**, if that means anything to you). The whole noise scene - rather like the milieu around contemporary artists like Damien Hirst - seems to be dominated by a lot of pretentious bastards spouting inane, abstruse technical waffle to disguise the fact that the actual art is worthless. So, this didn't take me wholly by surprise. Now, turn this up really loud on your stereo. If you like fifty minutes sonic equivalent to having your head strapped to a jumbo jet engine pod, all the way from the maintenance hanger to the runway and beyond, this might be your thing. Although listening to the music on tape is probably more dangerous to your mental and (subsequently) physical health. Once again, distribute free hallucinogens for use with the promos and you'd get better reviews. Lee, I'm sorry old chum but honesty has ultimately prevailed. (£5/\$10)

TRANSCENDENCE (Can) - Eternal Stream CD'96
GAIA DISK

Gaia Disk have here produced some of the most detailed release notes ever to accompany a CD. This, having listened to the actual music, must be put down to first release fervour rather than matching some great musical *pièce de resistance*. **Transcendence** are from the school of progressive death metal where it is fashionable to incorporate many boring, instrumental cows-in-the-meadow type bits between flimsy metal sections. By flimsy, I mean that combination of a clunky drum sound and disastrous buzzing guitars. The interaction between male and female vocalist is neither poor nor meritable, and aside from some nice, insipidly catchy, melodic sections (such as in "Beyond Soring Winds" [sic] it is hard to pinpoint where the Canadians are coming from at all. The use of cello and flute is pretty pointless, and many of the songs sound superfluous and boring at worst. One of the synth-dependent instrumentals sounds very much like old pointy-ears-and-nose-from-Halmstad's work, incidentally. (\$15 (USA/CANADA)/\$20 (ELSEWHERE))

TREST (Slo) - Bow to None Demo'97

Short but very impressive four song demo incorporating funk metal somewhere between **Primus** and **Biohazard**, which is better than that looks on papyrus. Powerful and clean low vocal over the top of top-notch bass and drum rhythms featuring tight and excellent musicianship. Catchy and even danceable, surely a signing is inevitable despite their nationality. Nice stuttered snare-tickling in "Hitches", a bit too close for comfort to **Extreme** (remember them? - you didn't want to, did you?) Colossal riffs and funky-dancing acoustic instrumental title track. These sections are better than the metal parts, which seem a touch disjointed and fractious. BAUEROVA 15, 040 23 KOSICE, SLOVAKIA.

TSATHOGGUA (Ger) - Trans Cant Whip CD'98
OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

So, looks like the little spate reported between in the last issue between **Marduk** and these Krauts was based on this album being released with the packaging of the Swedes' **Nightwing** hyperblast and no one batting an eyelid; the production and style of black metal being so similar, with in this case less emphasis resting on speed and more on memorable riffery and minutely more tuneful vocals. The title

changed direction slightly since the worthy *Walpurgisnacht* full-length. The black metal approach with those over-booming vocals is still the backbone, but the context is slower and progressively more orchestral. The second track is a pure synthesiser workout, or even a classical ensemble - the cello is damn convincing - but doesn't do much for me. Sandwiching tracks are however better, and mix that classic Greek tack on black metal with some interesting ethnic approaches and classical instrumentation. Thus "The Vision of a Nameless Soul" owes much to folkly embellishments à la *Lux Occulta*, and the far superior "The Grim Palace" gains much ground through epic atmospheres and quite genius incorporation of dual violin harmonies at one enlightened point. There are manifold niggles, not least the airy, vacuous production on the promo tape; the vocals are too coarse and uncouth for the music when it's not involved in the (sparse) straight-ahead metal sections, and some of the synth is clumsy, even cheesy. However, with similarly memorable riffs, increased use of cultural influences (the kind *Septic Flesh* go on about, y'know) and more of the songwriting in the vein of the first song, *Varathron*'s next effort could well be their underground breakthrough.

VARIOUS - 21st Century Media Blitz CD'97
CENTURY MEDIA

You may think my relationship with Century Media is a little too cosy, perhaps due to the many interviews with their bands in these pages. Believe it not! It's mainly thanks to the courtesy of Andy Turner, who actually does some work (unlike many other press/promotional label representatives), and the fact that the label has snapped up some of the better names recently. Nonetheless, this compilation - which is orientated mostly to the hardcore end of their roster - is largely redundant. The best tracks are from bands whose releases I have reviewed previously, *Rotting Christ*, *The Gathering*, and *Samael*. *Tiamat* are really the only other metal band proper here, with the sleepy "Cold Seed". From the rest, *Slapshot*'s thrashy hardcore is fast, exhilarating and generally to-the-point, while *My Own Victim*'s fusion of melody and rhythm deserves admiration. *Stuck Mojo* contribute two songs which seem from different bands. The second, "Southern Pride" has that lightweight, MTV-friendly *Pantera* swagger, with a central catchy hook, but I wouldn't lose any sleep over it if you aren't acquainted with them. Of the other bands which I suppose could be lumped in with the hardcore crowd, *Backfire* and *Meruder* are nondescript and boring, only *Turmoil* managing to make their angst seem genuine, while *Gurd* back their brand of core with an interesting techno beat (it's better than it sounds). I'd never heard Devin Townsend's *Strapping Young Lad*, whose offering here, "All Hail the New Flesh" is an amalgam of fast, heavyweight drumming and ethereal backing synthesizers. I must say I prefer the man's philosophy to his music. *Exodus*' classic "Bonded by Blood" (misspelt on the sleeve) sounds good though, although it probably made more sense all those years ago. A slightly different take on gothic metal is provided for by *Vasaria*, whose broodiness with strange keyboards isn't really conducive to further investigation. Though I am averse to any compilation featuring the likes of *Eychatogod* (their sludgy stoner nonsense is plain awful), there are some good bands here, but there's also a lot of deadwood, as perhaps we might come to expect from a large German company.

VARIOUS - Cheap Shots Volume III CD'98
BURNING HEART RECORDS

Pretty much a wide selection of punk toons here, only some of which are remotely interesting. While the more metal-loving strains of *Refused* from Sweden, *Within Reach* and the *Satanic Surfers* are perhaps more accessible to these ears, note also the great vocals and catchy pop-punk chords of *No Fun At All*'s "Catch Me Running Round" which will appeal to the playful hardcore of all of us. *Breach* are aggressive, but too claustrophobic, *Millencolin* more melodic and twice as effective. Out of the rest of the tracks, there's the more left-of-field (or should that be more commercial?) strains of *Liberator* and *Chickenpox*, with the ska contingent out in force through the ranks of *Ducksoup* and *The Skatones*. Ephemeral yet interesting.

VARIOUS - Death... is Just the Beginning DCD'97
NUCLEAR BLAST RECORDS

This is about as good as it gets, by the standards of compilations. Even though I could trot out over half a dozen of the leading lights in extreme metal as examples of the musical might on show, it would do a disservice to the more obscure acts. The strength in depth here stems from the talent on show in the lower divisions as it were. Thus, there's the odd-but-not-far-from-Swedish strains of *Withered Beauty* (the Swedish *Forlorn*'s side-project) and the almost cute, fragile melodiousness of *Night in Gales*. Both *Darkseed* and *Evereve* suffer from poor vocals, but the music - respectively light and poppy, and lugubrious - walks a long way up the road to redemption. *Tägtgren's Pain* leaves me largely nonplussed, although there is a very notable *Fear Factory* edge to the track. *Gorefest*'s "Tired Moon" is close to where *Carcass* would have been *Svanung-era*, albeit with more beefiness and a strong production. *Dreadful Shadows* would gain a lot by losing the singing, since their orchestral but very catchy goth-cum-metal is meritable indeed. *Slapdash* (once *Rosicrucian*) whip through the cracking "Kill Yourself" by S.O.D. in what is the most hardcore of the offerings here. *Pyogenesis*' effort is more monotonous than poppy, while *Left Hand Solution*'s soft-tendilled smooth edges are nothing less than lovely. Two substandard efforts come from *Disbelief* and *Brutality*, but you'd be hard pressed to find a lame track elsewhere. Even from *Crematory*. Close your eyes and imagine they're not German, ignore the Fisher-Price toy synthesiser and trust me, it won't hurt at all. Likewise *Mortification*; forget that they're Christian and it's actually listenable. Like it or not.

VARIOUS (Cze) - Echoes from the Underworld Volume II CD'96
TWIST RECORDS

The Czech underground isn't in as critical condition as our British one, if this is anything to go by, since quite a few of these bands would be signed if they happened to have the connections of being in a slightly more occidental country. We'll start with the bad news. *Ingrowing* are your typical brutal death act, and typically, they suck. *Isaacarum* play sloppy sort of black metal - when their drummer's feeling up to it - which is uninteresting, save for the track "Dead Poets", which starts off a bit like our own *Cradle of Filth* before becoming considerably folksy and belting out a decent melody over solo percussion. Another English comparison is partly valid in the case of *Disfigured*, who mimic *Napalm Death*'s contemporary bounciness in their first song, but crank on less comparable melodies in the subsequent offering. The strangely named *Siax* play curious death metal strangely reminiscent of Norwegian group *Bethzaida* (long time, no hear) and they seem to be buzzing with creativity, despite not putting it all on to best effect. *Ritual* fittingly have a black metal image, although they play more like a grindcore band with horror atmospherics. That's all pretty nice, and reminds me of a faster, heavier *Crypt of Kerberos* (ring any bells?). The next best track on the compilation appears courtesy of *Godless Truth*, whose technical slant on death metal is brutal but never dull. Their only fault is probably over-complication and a lack of break-down-able song structures. No surprises then that *Forgotten Silence* win the day, with their fourteen minute epic, "The Old Memories". I've heard better, newer stuff from them, but this is great, combining melody, heavy drama and tonnes of out-of-field ideas. The future belongs to them, surely!

VARIOUS - In Conspiracy with Satan - A Tribute to Bathory CD'98
HELLSPAWN/NO FASHION RECORDS

Thirteen bands contribute to this, only two of which are not Swedish, namely the Norwegian black metal ambassadors *Emperor* and *Satyricon*. So, homage is paid to Quorthon's first four albums, and I would argue that *Hammerheart* stuff is worthy for inclusion too, but I guess that would be asking too much of the old-school David 'Blackmoon' Pärland, the father of this 'ere compilation. Furthermore, it could have been more interesting had the Scandinopitism hadn't been so overbearing; but I suppose administrative factors played their part in the parochial outlook. The moronisms of *Nifelheim* and their ilk are offset by worthwhile renditions of "Woman of Dark Desires" (*Marduk*) and "Born for Burning" (*Satyricon*), while Pärland's own *Necrophobic* offers us a great romp through "Enter the Eternal Fire"; ironically one of the less basic of the cover versions here. It's very much a question of which songs you like in their original versions, but I don't particularly want to hear *Gehennah* going through the (bowel) motions again. This is a bit samey to me, and could have done with some different versions that don't snuggle up to the originals so tightly, the *Celtic Frost* compilation by Dwell Records was better in that respect. One unforgivable mistake is the track listing error which swaps *Sacramentum* and *Necrophobic*'s tracks - otherwise something of a disappointing collection.

VARIOUS - Near Dark Compilation Volume I MC'96
NEAR DARK PRODUCTIONS

Let's review this one systematically shall we? *Besech* provide us with a few minutes of dour but passable death metal with highly questionable vocals. If you've never heard Finland's *Thy Serpent* before, cover your ears now, because their unreleased track here is murky beyond belief and of demo quality. One of the highlights of the tape are *Dissolved*, whose widdly death metal is both melodic and powerful. Indeed I'm stunned that I have not heard their name drop before. Four black metal tracks complete the first side, of which *Funeral Frost* - in keeping with their monicker - are the most generic. *Chambre Noir*'s darkness is chaotically fast, but fails ultimately on the grounds of being rickety and bass-heavy. *Nahash*, who seem to have something of cult appeal, are not much better; so messy and desperate for atmosphere they simply don't cut it for me. The unheard-of *Cabaret for Bereaved*'s effort is slow and basic black metal, but not without naive charm. Flipping over to the better side of the compilation, *Melek Taus* kick off with their excellent mini-CD introduction, followed closely by one of their gems from *Chained and Desperate*'s demo. Unfortunately, clueless is the only word that succinctly describes Teutons *Götterdämmerung*'s foray. *A Mind Confused* give us a reasonable throw of their pre-CD release death metal, as do *Withering Surface* (the demo version of one of the weaker songs on their debut CD). Shadows from the past in the shape of a track from *The Marble Icon*, whose mildly impressive death/doomy demo was reviewed an issue ago. Lastly, *Imperial*'s effort did not augur well for the future, and is simply awful. (\$5)

VARIOUS - No Holy Additives Part 2 CD'98
ELDETHORN RECORDS

It's good to see many of the bands crowning the Braindead Club's stage represented here on posh silver disc, and although I never caught the first *No Holy Additives* this is encouraging stuff. There's previously-reviewed material by *Frozen Shad-track* from Portadown's *Epoch*. The best of the rest include the very convincing *Metallica/Pantera*-styled *Sanctum*, an unleased, quintessential (though spoiled by an over-loud drum machine) black metal epic from *Ewigkeit*, and the *Bolt Throwing* nods from *Violation*. *Interlock* provide a track in a

similar style to their demo songs, with lots of female/male vocal interplay. *History of Guns* let down the side badly with an ill-performed and generally piss-poor goth offering, while *Gabriel* (signed to Steve Green's Unknown Territory label) provide reasonably classy but thin-sounding melodic doominess. It would be polite to mention *54th*'s well-played but unremarkable deathrash, and *Skin Trench*'s powerchord-driven death-cum-hardcore. *Grey's Suffering* throw in two short blasts of clumsy yet catchy death metal (it's good to see them up-and-running again). *Dyatirbe*'s more commercial fare is instantly forgettable, but considerably better than the horrendous vocals of *History of Guns*. Stupid name, stooped band! *Götterdämmerung* are the ambassadors from Deutschland, and they serve up melodic doom and blackish death in the very same track. Schizometal *Crin*'s funnybone was undoubtedly thwacked by caustic deathrashers *Scald* and if that's not enough, here's a black metal band with a demo distributed from Mr *Godraal*'s own abode! *The Meads of Asphodel*, as they are called, play ultra-weird drum-machined blackness with some of the oddest synth ever to be heard. I wouldn't have expected anything less if that man's got anything to do with it.

VARIOUS - Out of the Dark Live Compilation CD'97
CENTURY MEDIA

Twelve songs including two songs from each of Century Media's most popular live acts. If that doesn't add up, you're on the ball. It's due to Massacre Records' *Crematory* have managed to sneak a ride on the end of the disc. The tracks by *Moonspell*, *Rotting Christ* and *Samael* were recorded in late 1996 in Krakow, Poland, while the other bands' performances were captured elsewhere, somewhere. Whilst the production on these live recordings is by and large satisfactory, I can't think of reasons to buy this unless you happen to have been at those Krakow gigs or you are dead keen on the bands. *Moonspell*'s efforts are fragile in the live arena, though not disastrously so, in contrast to *Samael*, who manage to put across their futuristic techno-industrial black metal effectively, including a rejuvenated "My Saviour" from their debut. *Anneke from The Gathering* is a truly marvellous singer who does it all as brilliantly well here as on record, and the band's live tracks (from *Mandylion*) are probably my favourites of the whole compilation, spectacular! *Sentenced*'s rocka rolla metal also sounds good in the live arena, with vocalist living up to his miseriguts image with shouts of, "I feel like killing myself, how about you?" in the middle of "Bleed". No thanks mister, although certain people seem to rate *Crematory* as giving them thoughts to that effect. I don't entirely agree with their criticism; they were using the keyboards long before most bands, and the song "Ist es Wahr" here is actually remarkably catchy, say what you will about the Teutonic singing. Their other track doesn't live up to the same standard though and I can't say I'm that sad to have missed them onstage.

VARIOUS - Raise Your Arms to Christ Compilation MC'96

One of the first tapes to have crossed my threshold after the release of the second issue, *Raise Your Arms to Christ* - brought to us by Craig of *Death to Dead Things* magazine - is the last compilation to be reviewed here ever. I can't say I'll miss them, although they all have their moments. The main criticism I have over this ninety minute offering is the uniform poor sound quality. When many of the bands are strikingly brutal, this does affect the sound produced overall. There are some old favourites here, such as *Mortavik*, *Flesh Feast*, *Ragnarok*, as well as toons from *Adorior* and a much better track from the ubiquitous and otherwise disappointing Haninge metallers *A Mind Confused*. Otherwise, there's not much to report. *Desolate* play pummelling and varied-speed death metal, with a wide range of influences and some fleeting synth work. There's a demo-era song from *Svartsyn* (mildly entertaining black metal) and some more easy listening, melodic death from *Potugeezers In Solitude*. Fellow countrymen *Heavenwood* run through a song later added to their debut CD, which is commercial but somehow tacky and unsatisfactorily slapdash. *Moonrise* play (relatively) calmer material; death metal with prominent keys and sung passages, while *Blighty*'s own *Narcosis* give you a headache with their sample-riddled grindcore. The only real curiosities are the two songs from *Onslaught*; a rehearsal and a live rendition of "Power from Hell" taken from a Bristol gig in 1987, and even then the sound quality of the former is unlistenable. IMMORTALCIDE PRODUCTIONS, 129 TUTBURY RD., BURTON-ON-TRENT, STAFFS DE13 0NU, ENGLAND.

VARIOUS - Smells Like Teen Spirit II CD'97
DISPLEASED RECORDS

As with previous compilations I will ignore the tracks by *Consolation*, *Eternal Solstice*, *Unlord*, and *Sadist* since their full-lengths have been dissected elsewhere (although there are a couple of unreleased numbers too, but let's make this easy for ourselves, shall we?). Representing retrothrash stand the tongue-in-cheek *Whiplash* and the more refined, vibrant *Pentacle*, whose effort is too long but certainly entertaining. *Altar* seem to be behaving themselves a lot more nowadays, and it's a shame; some of the militantly-atheist vitality of *Youth Against Christ* has dissipated with the two tracks here post-*Ego Art*. They

now employ acoustic intros, more commercial shades of death metal and plaintive melodic riffs, but it seems like they are becoming an old man's death metal band, if you catch my drift. One of the highlights of the Displeased roster undoubtedly comes in the shape of **God Dethroned**, one of whose songs here captures that fresh death/black intensity that permeates their *The Grand Grimoire* opus. Ha, **Infernäl Mäjesty** always looked rather naff in their photographs, but seem to be something of an old-timer's classic act. Their music is actually compelling thrash with some killer riffs and a singable - though rough - vocal line. There's nothing much to choose between the likes of **Stentorian** and **Nembrionic**; the latter plays chugga chugga metal, while the former meddle with slightly extraordinary (but not worth worrying about) deffuckin-metal. Finally, revelation of the pack is the tune by **Red Harvest**, which is a huge open-air, epic soundscape created by almost ambient death metal orchestration. A band that paints impressive pictures with their music. Oh darn, I thought I was supportive of English metal bands and I forgot our own **Hybernoid**. Well, metal seems a loose-fitting robe for them now; their "Kullu" track consists of an irritatingly repeated sample over tribalistic electronic beats. I'll pass on that and instead choose to look back with fondness on the bleak textures of their debut's highlight "Akeldama".



vermin

VARIOUS (Can) - Sonic Obliteration II CD'97

BLACK MARK PRODUCTION

It's time for the Canadian scene to come under the spotlight. Here we have twelve songs largely from the grungier end of death metal. Actually, I tell you a lie, because not many of the songs have that much to do with that genre (death metal that is, not grunge). In fact, not many of the songs are that good at all. **Inner Thought** play moderately industrial death metal with a bit of a progressive cant and female vocals in the mid-section. The abnormally-named **Summertime Daisies** play utterly uninspiring brutal death, but that's about all the connections with the genre on the disc. **Krug** can be compared to **Nine Inch Nails**, and are probably the most commercially viable act on the compilation, but that style means almost nothing to me. Still, it's better than the colourless, often nauseatingly oppressive, industrial waste that fills up the rest of the track listing. The only other songs of note are the efforts by **Soulstorm** (rap metal), **Mundane** (dance metal with flute) and the much better **Rolha**, who play what can roughly be described as ambient - or even trancelike - trip-hop style rock (does that make sense or do I not know what I'm talking about?), which is both pleasantly relaxing and different.

VARIOUS (Hun) - A Tribute to Tormentor MCEP'98

OSIRIS PRODUCTIONS

There must be better ways of honouring **Tormentor** than having an obscure Slovakian label releasing a shitty tape with two unheard-of Hungarian black metal bands doing their best to live up to the magic. Fortunately, it's not a complete waste of time. **Frost** have the honour of representing "Elizabeth Bathory", and while they completely miss much of the subtlety of the song, it does bring back the memories (of whenever I last listened to the real thing) and the probably unintentional powerful bass drum in the chorus part drives things on well. True, the sound quality is dense and abysmal, but this is hardly pretentious stuff. The other lot **Ahriman**, cover "Beyond..." and focus on the keyboards; in fact to such a degree that they are ludicrously overpowering. The production is better here, and some of the atmosphere is captured lovingly, but that doesn't mean the band do their idols any justice. Probably best leave the past alone, or only let it surface on the live stage eh? (\$4)

VEIL OF SORROW (Swe) - Autumn Lustre Demo'96

I was penned an indignant letter when this one slipped through the net and escaped review in the last issue, so I'd better display some contrition here. Well bugga that, I don't need to; this is damn professional material in the vein of **Cemetery** and **Sentenced**. The colour cover is flawed only in the way in which the landscape photos partly obscure the lyrics, which are more romantic than suicidal (in case you got hooked on that **Sentenced** comparison - these guys aren't Finnish after all). Otherwise there's a strong sound, compelling chainsmoker vocals and musicianship that is tight as tight can be. The rocking groove just falls into place ever so easily, although there are other moments creating a stomping rhythmic feel, and although this is not quite my cup of brew, one can but doff one's cap at their accomplishments. The riffs are more foot-tapping than hair-raising, although there's one brilliant sky-high-flying riff in the track "The Dark Suffering". No keyboards or female vocals are to be found on *Autumn Lustre*, just the occasional solo and pure heavy metal. DAMIAN URBAN, HAMREY 20A, S-821 34 BOLLNAS, SWEDEN.

VENUSIAN DEATH CELL (Ire) - Reap Invert Demo'96 / Natural Harmony Demo'97 / Opening the Graves Demo '98

An utterly moronic one-man band, consisting of a snare drum, bass drum, two-chord riffs, and a couple of scales you would learn in your second-ever guitar lesson. The artwork allows you a glimpse through the eyes of the protagonist of this crap, whose IQ has got to be struggling to top my mass in kilograms (and I'm no body-builder). Oh, there's some vocals too, which give the overall impression to the music as listening to a madman hammering nails into his own hand

(very slowly). The first demo is slightly better in that there is no production whatsoever, and so you cannot quite hear how dire it is. A muffled blur at least does not distract you from working. In the last demo, the title track is misspelt, "Opening of the Grave". Hmm. Mr. Vora told me this was no sick joke, so he must be a very disturbed individual to unleash this on me. No more Charitable donations: £1.25/\$3 (last two demos), £2.50/\$5 (*Reap Invert*) / 29 WHITECHURCH HILL, BALLYBODEN, DUBLIN 16, IRELAND.

VERMIN (Swe) - Millennium Ride CD'98

NO FASHION RECORDS

Demonic be-bop? Satanic swing? Desperate attempts to market a record that just skims off the success of **Entombed**, cover concept included? The latter is in fact the only answer that can be answered in the affirmative. It's interesting that No Fashion Records have gone a bit off-track in arranging the band on their rosters - they obviously have noticed the market for this death 'n' roll nonsense. One of the bandmembers looks uncannily like Dani Filth too don't you think! That doesn't stop the music - which is played fairly well enough - being unenthralling.

VIOLENT DISORDER (USA) - Demon Society Demo'96 / Promo'97

This band was a regrettable inclusion in my second issue, but I hoped something beneficial would come out of a listen to their musical material; sent to me after the aforesaid magazine was shipped over the pond to the band's native Ohio. Sadly it wasn't to be. One newer track ("Reality Check") aside, their bludgeoning death metal is laboured and uninteresting to these ears, nevermind the fact that my tape's first ten minutes are warped and practically inaudible. Having indistinguishable guitar riffs and letting the constipated gorilla take on vocals were probably not great ideas either. \$4 / P.O. BOX 51, BETHEL, OH 45106, USA.

VITAL REMAINS (USA) - Forever Underground CD'97

OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS

An American death metal band coming to terms with the fact that distinguishing traits are required in order to survive the present musical climate, perhaps? **Vital Remains** aren't a bad prospect, and more of the death 'n' roll with a nod to **Entombed** shown on the song "Battle Ground" probably wouldn't be a bad idea for this band to skim over the hordes in their chosen genre over the pond. *Forever Underground* does have songs, such as "Divine in Fire", as opposed to pounds and pounds of blast and mindless riffing, but they need to concentrate on this aspect most in order for greater respect. The Nietzschean "I Am God" has a peculiar keyboard accompaniment to its central riff, but its highlight is definitely the Hispanic-style guitar melody solo in the middle of the less colourful deff metal. However, the diversity isn't always so delightful: the keyboard piece acting as an interlude between the five other long songs is ill-fitting and would seem more silly and surplus to requirements on any more synth-oriented album. The band has pulled itself away from the crowd, but will need to wrench itself into the open if they are to achieve significant success. Perhaps though, as they hint here, that is not an option, and their wish is to remain *Forever Underground*.

VOMITORY (Hol) - Raped in their Own Blood CD'96

FADELESS RECORDS

Essentially moshing, bouncy death metal to a tee, **Vomitory** would be the most utterly boring - though admittedly they are musically competent - act if they didn't change the pace of their onslaught as often as they did. Hence, there are slower, melodic passages and on the final song, the twin guitar work reminds me of *With Fear I Kiss the Burning Darkness* by **At the Gates**, both in terms of the music and production.

That only lasts a minute or two though, and the songwriting is certainly nowhere near the level of that opus. In the light of all these decidedly mediocre releases, one wonders how the classics - let's say for the sake of argument **Carcass's Necroticism: Descending into the Subliminal** - were made as good as they were in the early 1990s. Bands simply should not be allowed to get away with doing the same thing all over again, as *Raped in their Own Blood* generally does, aside from the cool air raid siren introduction (which I'm surprised that as far as I know hasn't been used before). It could all be so much worse, but **Vomitory** just need character by the bucketful. Having **Gehennah's** Ronnie Olson for a singer won't help much either guys.

WALLACHIA (Nor) - Demo (re-released on) CD'97

VELVET MUSIC INTERNATIONAL

I'm not sure whether these guys have released anything new yet, but regardless of your opinion of re-releasing demos on silver, at least you get half an hour of friendly black metal with excellent sound quality. **Wallachia** are from the school of soft, sugar-coated black metal with warm wafts of synthesiser melodicism misting over the (not off-putting) drum machine. It's something like a more ambient **Thy Serpent**, if you put a spiked

wristband to my neck. Opener "Fullmåne Over Fargeras" is ten minutes of simple, but soothingly pleasant mid-paced metal. Nothing new here, but everything flows quite wonderfully and the utter simplicity of the semitone-interval synthwork is not a hindrance, to the contrary it sets an example to many who over-orchestrate. Unfortunately, Eystein's vocals are completely and clumsily incoherent and work only in so far as being background noise and some more depth and texture. The other three tracks are far less happening besides obligatory wolf howling and acoustic parts; coming precariously close to musak. **Wallachia** will have to do better than this if they are to provide a noteworthy debut proper.

WAYLANDER (UK) - Reawakening Pride Once Last CD'98

CENTURY MEDIA RECORDS

A surprisingly risky signing by Century Media, presumably hoping - post-Cruachan - to invest in the Irish novelty value of this bunch. Interesting that this review happens to be written in the middle of the Drumcree stand-off though isn't it? Anyway, I don't wish to profess any views on that (and I don't have any anyway) lest I stick my foot in my mouth as done before. If you feel I have got the nationality of the band wrong, please write in! Anyway, the sound is a little frail, the vocals drifting into insipidity on occasion. **Fart's** tin whistle works best on the faster jigs, as does the music in general. So, we're not looking here at a band deserving to stand with influences Walkyrie and company circa "The Widdershins Jig" by any means; the practice room guitar on "Emain Macha" is unforgivable for instance. Simpler songs with the hints of darkness work well, such as "With Veins Afire" and its heavy double bass drum blasts. Among previously aired re-worked demo tracks, we are presented with a naively charming instrumental, "Gaelic Dawn", and a supposedly 2000 year-old piece "King of the Fairies", which, suiting them, is faithfully covered. "Victory Feast" is more promising, but **Waylander** need tightness, a more focused sound, and a loss of the pointless-at-best-and-tedious-at-worst soloing. More of the Irish approach and less of the metal could well be the way to go for a more cogent sound. If they can lose the fragility of the sound, good and memorable songs like "Awakening" would come off a lot better.

WITHERING SURFACE (Den) - Scarlet Silhouettes CD'97

EUPHONIOUS RECORDS

Yeah, yeah, this is that Danish death/black metal band that sound like they're from Sweden. But so what? It's at least slightly more interesting than a Swedish band that sound like they're from Sweden. More to the point, **Withering Surface** are actually better than the average act out of Sverige, their title track on this effort mixing raging razor riffs with total fury. Vocalist Michael Andersen thanks his future wife on his personal credits, but I don't think she'll thank him for wasting her lipstick and eyeliner on the band's promotional photography. Furthermore, Andersen's 'erotic' lyrics suggest he has too much invested in their sex life (don't accuse me of prying; he eagerly reveals it) and I hope they don't run out of ideas in the bedroom, since his lyrics would consequently suffer terribly. Nonetheless, *Scarlet Silhouettes* is as good an album as any in which the better side of the Swedish sound is demonstrated; trilling guitars, strong melodies and Michael's effective snarl (and considerable vocal variation) capping it all off. While the first four tracks of the album show excellent, scorching songwriting, there seems to be a creative lull later on in the record, where Gabriella's keyboards clear the mood but nothing really fills the gaps left behind in the riffing department. The final track is better, with a definite commercial feel and a feeling of depth and grandiosity. Don't get me wrong: this is almost a killer release, but hopefully their sophomore outing will be more convincingly murderous.

ZEUS (UK) - Fear Demo'97

Another one-man project, this time from Bolton. It seems I'm not alone in not wishing others to step with muddy feet upon my sapient inscriptions (now where did I nick that song lyric from?). Still, it's not totally autonomous, since some of the lyrics were written by outsiders. Essentially

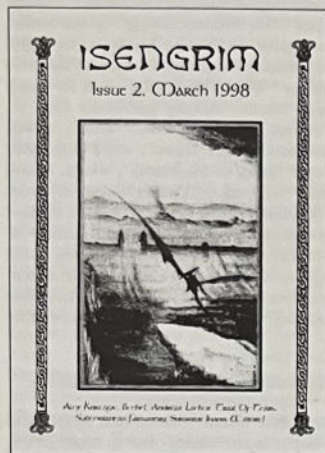
Fear consists of bludgeoning death/black metal which relies on slow to mid-paced powerful riffing, occasional acoustic interludes and some of the most brutal death vocals this side of **Septic Flesh**. There's some reason why I am strongly reminded of the older material of now-dead **Beherit** and maybe the best of old **Thus Defiled**. It's all to do with the primitive, yet bizarrely catchy music in conjunction with the vocalisation, y'see. The black metal influence is most apparent in the track "Zeus", which is a full-on blast for most of its duration. This is at first entertaining stuff, but I couldn't quite figure out why, since there's nothing that clever or different about it. In fact, with further listens it gets very boring very quickly, and it all made much more sense. Damn, if it isn't another English band I have to put in their place. £3.50/\$7 / MIKE MAYERS, 112 LEE LANE, HORWICH, BOLTON, LANCs BL6 7AL, ENGLAND.





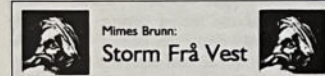
I suppose that the first *Isten* experience, for some inexperienced underground editors, is akin to being plugged in to the Total Perspective Vortex in Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. By that I mean having read it, said individuals suddenly realise how infinitely insignificant their publications are in comparison. It's like that, except it isn't as fatal as Adams' creation was. And if I had to decide whether I'd rather go to bed with *Mädchen* or her *Twin Sister*, I'd probably choose the former although I would have to think about it for some time first. You see, both the first two issues of the *Headwind* trilogy of *Isten* magazine are intensely readable, humorous and sophisticated. The chaotic cut-and-paste style of the latter is just slightly hard on the eyes, and coupling this with the minutely less interesting selection of bands (but varied from *Agathodaimon* to *Two Witches* and *Sup*) means that *Mädchen* is my issue of choice. The book-like approach was an idea whose time definitely had come, and in contrast *Twin Sister* seems a little uncouth and rebellious. Without wishing to state the obvious, but for those not into zinedom, *Isten* reigns supreme and untroubled several levels over its nearest competitors. Although the Finnish dark humour doesn't make reading the most positive-thinking new-age spiritual experience, *Isten's* masterly prose and wit arrogantly smashes down all the scene taboos that have remained standing far too long. To illustrate the genius, consider the editorial musing had concerned themselves with: "Yes, it was most important to know that a *Gorgoroth* member had been spotted lapping up strawberry ice-cream with a spoon at Elm Street wearing spikes and corpsepaint. It was even more important to know who was a Nazi this week and who wasn't." Uncomfortably accurate for many too. *Mädchen* £3/\$5, *Twin Sister* \$4/\$7 / MIKKO MATTILA, PELTOLAMINKATU 6 A 17, 33840 TAMPERE, FINLAND.

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The second issue of *Isegrim* may look thin and unassuming, but closer inspection reveals it to be heading down the same road as fellow Finns Mattila and Sarne (interviewed here in fact) turned down long ago. Despite some slightly musing moments, the reviews stay interesting without becoming uninformative. On the other side, the few interviews with luminaries known and unknown are mature, charismatic and fluent. Kristian Piilä, editor-in-chief, has been drafted into the *Isten* ranks for the upcoming opus, which should stop his brainchild from looking like a paler imitation of that magazine. \$5 / MECHE-LININKATU 13A 14, 00100 HELSINKI 10, FINLAND.

Storm frå Vest has flaws yes, but I'm quite happy to take them, since this initial instalment of *Mimes Brunn* is just about the most entertaining read about these days. People will remember the arrogance from *Einberjum*, but thankfully we see Odinn, here on his own, has grown out of questions such as: "Who are the worst: Christians, Jews, Negroes, Pakistanians or Socialists?" [sic] And seeing that I've landed the man straight in the middle of political incorrectness, it should be pointed out that while the man's tastes will not be savoured by lefties, this is not some brown magazine for sad, disillusioned Nazis. Say what you like about the inclusion of three pages on Circle of Jormungandr and the numerous articles which delve a little more deeply into issues than black metallers are accustomed. It's good reading, like it or not. Furthermore, the editor's sense of humour ensures the magazine rarely descends into silly pseudo-intellectual self-righteousness, such as that which *Moondance* comes close to, for example. The reviews are a little disjointed perhaps, and some of the language is still just less than fluent, but only in a grammatically pedantic way that means the style is charmingly offbeat. The spirit is always easy to decipher though, and besides, there are more than enough worthy acts included. True strength of character and conviction make this a riveting read and one of the five top magazines in the underground. £3.90 (UK)/\$7 (EUROPE)/\$9 (OCEANIA, JAPAN, KOREA)/\$8 (ELSEWHERE) / P.R. YOUNGSTORGET, N-0028 OSLO, NORWAY.



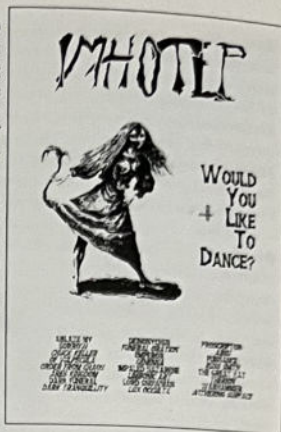
Storm frå Vest has flaws yes, but I'm quite happy to take them, since this initial instalment of *Mimes Brunn* is just about the most entertaining read about these days. People will remember the arrogance from *Einberjum*, but thankfully we see Odinn, here on his own, has grown out of questions such as: "Who are the worst: Christians, Jews, Negroes, Pakistanians or Socialists?" [sic] And seeing that I've landed the man straight in the middle of political incorrectness, it should be pointed out that while the man's tastes will not be savoured by lefties, this is not some brown magazine for sad, disillusioned Nazis. Say what you like about the inclusion of three pages on Circle of Jormungandr and the numerous articles which delve a little more deeply into issues than black metallers are accustomed. It's good reading, like it or not. Furthermore, the editor's sense of humour ensures the magazine rarely descends into silly pseudo-intellectual self-righteousness, such as that which *Moondance* comes close to, for example. The reviews are a little disjointed perhaps, and some of the language is still just less than fluent, but only in a grammatically pedantic way that means the style is charmingly offbeat. The spirit is always easy to decipher though, and besides, there are more than enough worthy acts included. True strength of character and conviction make this a riveting read and one of the five top magazines in the underground. £3.90 (UK)/\$7 (EUROPE)/\$9 (OCEANIA, JAPAN, KOREA)/\$8 (ELSEWHERE) / P.R. YOUNGSTORGET, N-0028 OSLO, NORWAY.

From the bowels of Northern Darkness Records came *Eternal Rest* fanzine. The second issue here is messy, A5 and xeroxed, but much like *Vampyrria*, provides enjoyable light reading with many well-known and less-well-known acts. Editor Max's English could be better, but then my Italian could have a vocabulary of more than five words. The reviews are all five-sentence affairs, very obviously rushed I fear. Arguably the funniest thing in the pages is the piss-take interview with *Seltaeb* (read backwards), that is frighteningly close to reality for many underground black metal bands. On the back is pictured a burning church with the caption: "The Only Church That We Recognise". Pretty cool, eh kids? Max has unfortunately stopped all underground activities, so send enquiries to Northern Darkness label head office.

Timo Tapani Ketola's *Dauthus* magazine is, as Kola Krauze would likely agree, the most beautiful underground publication ever seen. His layouts are stunning, the artwork and photography excellent. Paradoxically, in contrast to some of this romantic beauty, Timo's publication flows with the sort of nihilist hopelessness that builds the fairly eloquent but wonderfully soft-spoken editorial tone. The man is a Finn after all. Which would explain the razor blades dispatched with the first fifty or so copies... to a degree. Before we move off the subject of layout, mentioning the irritating *Fraktur* used as the primary font would probably not go amiss. For someone as myopic as yours truly, an hour in the company of *Dauthus* is enough to make my contact lenses cloud and my head begin to pound with an incipient migraine. Timo is a staunch defender of the underground, and many of the bands included are mostly low-key acts, but that said they have more to say for themselves than the average 100-interview a year 15,000-unit-sellers. Articles on suicide, and various other esoterica (including a book review and fascinating letter section) make sure that *Dauthus* is an all-encompassing experience. Ketola's magazine deserves far more than 200 copies an issue, considering we have the likes of "professional" German magazines selling ten times that number, because it is simply one of the highlights of the underground literary scene. But Timo, would your magazine lose anything more than an ounce of charm if you ditched that font? OXENS GATA 253NB, 13663 HANINGE, SWEDEN.

There is a lot that's decent about *Imbotep* magazine, but there is also a stunning level of naivety there too. We're only a few sentences into issue four and editor Roy Kristensen is already clumsily and embarrassingly trying to explain that he is not homosexual. The reason for the explanation is his choice of theme for the issue, that of being a set of dances. The metaphor - though laboured

wouldn't be all that bad if Roy didn't proceed to incorporate this idea into all aspects of his publication. It just doesn't work. The editor's tragic misunderstanding of *Twin Sister's* logarithmic reviewing scale is but one example of a man struggling to comprehend things just that bit over his head. The third issue is a lively, if over-involved read, but the tragic mistake is quantity over quality, and the editorial tone is nothing more than babyish. If you want more an even more assaulting verdict on the third instalment of *Imbotep*, one can pick up *Mimes Brunn* and read *One-eye's* invective, but I think it's important to be more objective. There are some long and detailed interviews within the pages of the fourth issue, and even though Russ Smith again takes most of the credit for the best chats with the likes of *Vulpecula* et al., Roy's efforts are better than before. Though it is apparent that his abandonment of the question and answer format leaves something to be desired. Some of the layout niggles have been sorted out all right, with smaller font size and none of those horrible page borders, but the reviews are not really helpful or interesting. *Imbotep* remains a magazine with some seriously worrying flaws - ones that are more humorous than disastrous perhaps - but it would be naught but dishonest to claim that it wasn't worth reading or that it was anything less than an good underground magazine. Issue 4 (\$6), issues 3+4 (\$11) / Box 2559, 4004 ULLANDHAUG, NORWAY.



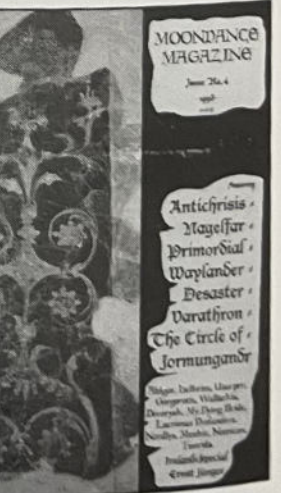
One American publication perhaps worth pursuing is *Shadows of Michelangelo* magazine. Thoughtfully-written if a little bland (both newspaper-layout-wise and as far as the writing goes), the reader is provided with plentiful interviews with some biggie names. There are some bizarre touches, such as the extended, distracted pieces on the state of the underground and music in general. One of these is rudely interrupted by a small interview which is totally unrelated to the content of the article. Most strange, and in other instances editor Dai seems a tad dotty too. Still, it's a full experience and even comes with a free compilation CD, so get writing. \$4 (USA)/\$5 (EUROPE, LATIN), \$6 (ELSEWHERE) / P.O. Box 12787, GAINESVILLE, FL 32604, USA.

Descent magazine seems to be the only American publication worth talking about at the moment, but that didn't mean that reading it from cover to cover was a great joy. Aside from a couple of masterstrokes (the Rorschach test administered to It of *Abruptum* being the main example), the magazine is unremarkable. You can't fool me with a professional layout, which though functional, is too gloomy, dark and completely devoid of the sort of charm which makes *Dauthus* such a treasure visually. Otherwise, many of the interviewees are not exactly *The Dead Sea* material, being often concerned more with the industrial and darkwave genres than metal per se. Too many of the answers consist of pretentious technical babble and pseudo-psychological nonsense, resulting in a dull read for laymen such as I. Still it's nice to hear the *Tormentor* story all these years on, and it's always a pleasure to hear what Mikael of *Opeth* has to say. Review-wise things aren't great, with the most inaccessible lumpen mound of minute text, and very superficial overviews for description. *Descent* remains therefore a pricey luxury that is probably beyond the needs of most. \$6 / Box 11741, OLYMPIA, WA 98502, USA.



Whisper it carefully, but editor Laurent here is a bit of a romantic. The eighth issue of his *Thrashing Rage* magazine has over 180 reviews, each one well-written and with good use of language, if a little pretentious. Minus points galore though for the fact that I have to look very hard indeed to find even an indifferent review here, let alone a bad one. The interviews (*My Dying Bride* etc.) are short but more thought-provoking than most, with the interviewees being quizzed on selected lyrics (which works better than you might think if you've only read *Imbotep*). There are a lot of big names featured, but all in all there's not enough depth in each one to satisfy. One fascinating insight was an update from *Master's Hammer*, which is about the only press the band seem to have had post-1995. The layout is professional, if basic, with some artwork of somewhat dubious quality. \$4 / B.P. 934, 73009 CHAMBERY CEDEX, FRANCE.

Timo Kölling and I have had something of a war of words, or rather a difference of opinions, recently. It mainly stemmed from my criticism of his *Equilibrium Manifesto*, which I perceived as a small and inoffensive plagiarisation of Circle of Jormungandr ideas. Anyway, things developed, and eventually ended in Timo stating that he despised "modern science". This I could understand as perfectly logical emanating from someone who preferred airy-fairy pseudo-intellectual waffle to fact. Anyway, let's not cloud the issue. *Moondance* magazine is actually a well thought-out effort - not completely spoiled by dodgy political groping - with a neat, reader-friendly layout and some interesting and substantial interviews. Although the latter predominantly feature acts from the black metal milieu, the one with *Antichrisis* is the most notable, not only for the sincere, detailed answering of interviewee Moonshadow, but the level of sensitivity that is shunned by a scene that is desperate to prove itself as macho as possible. It's not that often you read about a black metal-related band whose protagonist is bisexual, but I'm glad the guy admits it, probably the most brave statement coming forth for a long while. Did I mention that by purchasing this fanzine you get the lyric sheet for *Lunar Aurora's* second album? I have now. AN DER FRIEDENSEICHE 7, 32457 PORTA WESTFALICA, GERMANY.



With five contributors, England's *Death to Dead Things* covers a vast range of material. If it's metal and then some, it'll be covered, basically. So, a cursory glance at the contents page reveals features on *Cannibal Corpse*.



Narcosis, Stampin' Ground and **Tom Warrior**. The writing is witty and informative, and the only criticism would be the eclecticism of things: it's almost trying to be everything at once, and so while bits will appeal to everyone, it's never going to be anyone's favourite. There are a plethora of interesting tidbits about the older names in rock and metal, so the magazine has that broad scope in that respect. With almost 700 reviews inside, it was always going to be a squeeze to get 'em inside 32 pages, and they remain short and sweet. Suffice to say this publication is one of those with small print, but more importantly one of the most diverse and well-presented fanzines in the country. £1/\$2 / 24 MALVERN STREET, STAPENHILL, BURTON-UPON-TRENT, STAFFS DE15 9DY, ENGLAND.

Seventh Sign's first issue is free but for postal costs (\$8 for 4 issues - quarterly), and is a darn sight better than *Metablon*. Limited a touch by its Greek origin as far as the lingo is concerned, the magazine features decent

interviews with many power metal bands and even (sick bags ready?) **Metallica**, although there's **Emperor** here too (yawn). The reviews bore me and are somewhat questionable in so far as allegiances to advertisers in the magazine go. Featuring a silly, redundant score system where no review gets below 6/10 too. Nonetheless, the layout is pretty whilst remaining non-glossy. P.O. Box 34228, 10029 ATHENS, GREECE.

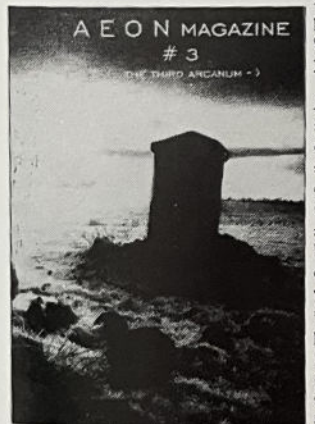
From the Lithuanian scene, *For Your Soul's* third issue is pleasant enough. Written by the musicians that make up most of their domestic scene, the magazine compensates for its budget appearance with some interesting and varied chats with the likes of **Sopor Aeternus** (and others from the metal/goth/darkwave scene) and **MorticiaNumskull** 'zine. Despite the additive charm of a couple of articles on Boadicea and Fly Agaric mushrooms, the reviews are lacking in substance. I'm not sure of the price, so write to co-editor Vaidas at the **Ha Lela** interview address.



Some things never seem to change. *Godreah* 'zine is one of those things, and although it's not the most heavyweight tome around (did I hear someone say 'lowbrow?'), Crin's joviality and lack of sense always has been a refreshing change from the self-importance of many magazines these days. Sure, the cartoons are silly, and some of the questions are childish, but it's all in bad taste and you can't complain about that, can you? *Godreah* is an excellent read for lighter moments, and somehow the man manages to extract a surprising amount from bands with his zany questioning style. You can't help laughing at the sheer insanity of the odd section, just imagining Crin, as he did an issue or two ago, asking a nonplussed Vegard Tveitan of **Emperor** whether he thought the *Reverence* EP was "a lithe and limber ensemble of melancholic pastoralism" (a Terryism). The reviews in issue eight are - as they tend to be in previous

releases - very diplomatic and (over)positive, although they remain descriptive with inventive imagery slotted in everywhere. Alongside the ten or so interviews, there is a worthwhile guide to the thrash classics of the '80s in the eighth issue. *Godreah* has become an underground institution and, despite being the biggest-selling English fanzine, still reeks of cult appeal. £5 (Europe), \$6 (elsewhere) per issue / 33 LILAC ROAD, HODDESDON, HERTS EN11 0PG, ENGLAND.

Mintakatalburg (I won't even think about typing that again) has the worst, messiest layout I've seen in a fanzine. Still, the Malaysian scene hasn't produced anything better as far as I know. There are some enthusiastic chats here, especially with the local bands, as well as antique interviews with **Enslaved** and **Immortal** (the former being amusing due to the very early photos, when Grute and company were less muscular). Otherwise, likely to be of little interest to Europeans, unless you're a complete globalist.



AEON magazine's third instalment is a somewhat involved read, and should be of interest for all budding students of the occult out there. Interviews with acts such as **Fire and Ice** and **The Equinox of the Gods** ensure that the esoteric elements are in the fore, although to editor Jörg's credit, things never become unreadable or swamped in ridiculous amounts of esoteric bullshit. His questions are to the point but both thought-provoking and conducive to some eyebrow-raising answers. There is a short story in there too, while the reviews have all been relegated to a small pamphlet that is entirely separate from the fabric of the magazine proper. Being completely removed from the attractive functionality of the main body of the text, the reviews are often scathing, so we can imagine honesty is to be assured in this department. A sour point is the almost incomprehensible interview with **Angizia** (a shame due to the individuality of that act) which would be one of the highlights of the issue if

it were not for the fact that the bandmember's grammar is atrocious (tho' his vocabulary seems impressive). No wonder we haven't read more interviews from them; the language barrier just hasn't been broken down yet. All in all, *AEON* is well worth checking out, even though the fractious nature of the publication makes it a mite impractical. \$5 / PF 100 842, 07708 JENA, GERMANY.

Ireland has had a bit of a post-*Deprived* vacuum in the fanzine department. Now though, Alan (coincidence my name is the same as an escaped IRA prisoner) Averill (of *The Oath* and *Primordial* fame) has teamed up with Darragh "Irish republican brotherhood of metal!" O'Leary (*Ancient Wisdom* - the 'zine not the band, you do!) to produce *Dlúth Cheangal Fáil*, or *Bond of Blood* if you prefer. Things look pretty rough from the outside, with a stapled xeroxed bunch of A4, but I for one have been there, done that and got that particular T-shirt. Inside, it's fairly chaotic too. Fortunately, *Bond of Blood's* prose is made of sterner stuff and boasts a characteristic editorial mixture of humour and sarcasm that goes down well in these parts. The interviews with **Solstice**, **Chris Reifert**, **Rotting Christ** etc. are by and large decent, although the Q & A style seems only half there; things are sitting on the fence between a feature format or keeping it dead simple. When it comes down to reviews, the guys often prefer to criticise mockingly than be objective, which is admittedly fine for the casual reader. It's when one demo review has no mention of musical description (and instead an *Isten*-esque and to be fair, mildly amusing, diversion) that things are going to be questioned. There are some quotations of black metal celebs around the place, mostly from the early '90s, which spices things up nicely. In addition you've got some articles about stuff which black metal is concerned with. Again: fine, but we're not talking blinding revelations here. There is a slapdash look about *Bond of Blood* that does detract from the reading experience, such as the simple error of not double-spacing after full-stops, and the aforementioned careless layout. More care next time and Ireland will again have something to be proud of. £3/\$6 (EUROPE) / \$7 (ELSEWHERE) / 22 STATION ROAD, SUTTON, DUBLIN 13, IRELAND.



My first acquaintance with *Metablon's* *Slayer* and, although I wasn't expecting a great deal, what I read was pleasantly surprising. *Slayer* is the quintessential fanzine: light-hearted editorial style, unsophisticated layout, and generally a bundle of fun. The interviews are mostly fine (the **Blood Axis** one being notably interesting) while the reviews are almost impossibly short and can be taken as the roughest of guides only. One feature of the fanzine I enjoyed were the historical overviews on seminal bands like **Motörhead** and **Sadistik Exekution** (the latter being greatly amusing), otherwise everything's very much straight down the line and easy to read. *Slayer's* eleventh issue is a hefty hundred pages long, and while it does not promise the most intellectual of discussions, is certainly a very respectable offering. \$9 (with which you get a free CD) / P.O. Box 447, 1701 Sarpsborg, Norway.

With more soul than most glossy "professional" magazines, the crew of *Mighty* mag's ninth issue have ensured an aesthetically passable effort. Everything's nicely laid-out if a little uninteresting. Shortish but pleasant, informing interviews with the likes of **In the Woods...** and **Six Feet Under**, but the highlight is definitely seeing what **Mortiiis** really looks like. Find out inside! BRANDHOLMS ALLE 26 F, 2610 RODOVRE, DENMARK.

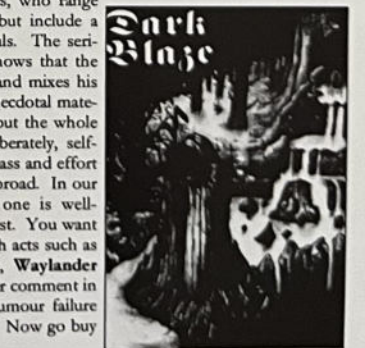
Go to the **Braindead Club** on a Friday night and chances are you'll see sloshed headbangers with an A4 wad sticking out of their pockets. That would be *Kentucky Fried Afterbirth*, *Grey's* own effort. Running said club and playing in **Suffering** doesn't leave the man with much spare time, and the style of his third issue is fundamental to say the least as far as layout is concerned. There is not one single picture - only band logos - in the 60 pages; making it a very dry proposition visually. *Grey* would have dearly loved a better computer and from the evidence of a biography for his aforesaid death metal band, I think he may have got access to one now. That's good, since the 'zine is packed with enthusiasm, with some interesting questions in the interviews (**Denial of God**, **Withering Surface**, **Occult** etc.) as well as the odd serialised short story. Go on, do it for the man who has done much for this beleaguered underground. The price is negotiable, but £1.50/\$3 should do it. 141 MONTAGUE ROAD, LEYTONSTONE, LONDON E11 3EW, ENGLAND.

Seriously chunky at 108 pages, and with a sultry temptress on the cover, Francesco Palumbo's *Vampyria* fanzine is quaint and underground to the core. Though its pages are A5 and the type is not tiny, a fairly hefty amount of information is packed between the covers. Some probing questions put to bands all the way from black metal to death metal - and even **Sopor Aeternus** - make this a useful read. The interviews aren't long, but are far less monotonous than many fanzines churn out, and include such established names as **Nightfall** in addition to smaller names that receive next to no underground media coverage. There are slight language difficulties editorially, but they never hinder the process of communicating information, and probably add to the charm of the thing. Not so charming are the badly xeroxed photos (I know how it feels mate) and the uniformly short, five-sentence reviews.

VIA SAN CLEMENTE 106, NOCERE SUPERIORE (SA) 84015, ITALY.

Just to keep away people who think that the **Hellhammer** poster and the retrospective cover photos on **Tales of the Macabre's** fourth issue are anything more than museum pieces, I suggest an 'over-21s only' sticker for Costa's brainchild. The contents are severely old-school and nostalgic in a way that can only be described as boring, albeit in a pathetic, affectionate sort of way. Most of the bands interviewed play that old-school stuff, and then Costa gets them all scoring points off each other in 'I've got more **Sodom** collectibles than you' contests. Sod off grandpa. Apart from a **Root** interview whose value is its rarity, that is it. The second issue was very much composed of modern black metal, which was great at the time, but this? Layout is the same as ever, that welcoming fusion of underground and desktop-published styles. The only other positive thing I can say about #4 are the reviews, which don't smell of roses, but which are more thought over than most established fanzines who review 500 releases with what seems like 5000 words. The geriatric depiction of *Tales of the Macabre* in *Mimes Brunn* is very apt. BRUNNENSTR. 6, 54538 KINDERBEURN, HETZHOFF, GERMANY.

Christ. Rob, the editor of *Drunk & Disorderly* fanzine, is younger than I am and he's already put out his seventh issue! The man knows very well that his baby isn't the prettiest on the market, and makes up for it with some chirpy and understated eloquent writing. The layout is indeed messy, functional and boring, with bad quality pictures amidst some nice cartoons pinched from Hislop and company at *Private Eye*. Rob has a knack of squeezing enlightening things out of his interviewees, who range pretty much across the board musically, but include a healthy clutch of UK underground hopefuls. The seriously massive amount of gigs reviewed shows that the editor supports the scene as best he can, and mixes his experiences of the bands with some nice anecdotal material. The reviews are nice and thorough, but the whole thing seems a bit British in that it's deliberately, self-deprecatingly unpretentious and lacks the class and effort to compete seriously with larger fanzines abroad. In our green and pleasant land, however, this one is well-rounded enough to be up there with the best. You want more details? OK, there are interviews with acts such as **Entwined**, **Dominion**, **Callenish Circle**, **Waylander** (Irish north/south paranoia here - see earlier comment in the first few pages), **Esoteric** (sense of humour failure here), **The Blood Divine** and **Entombed**. Now go buy



it - for England's sake! 41 GERARD ROAD, HARROW, LONDON HA1 2NE, ENGLAND.

Look at this kids, just above the editorial on page two of Syrragh *Dark Blaze* fanzine is a quotation from Uncle Adolf! Sieg heil Interviewees including **Veles** (what is this guy wearing?), **Capricornus** from **Graveland**, and the French **Funeral**, so it's brown all-round really. I could talk about the elite



messy xeroxed layout, the Judaic Judenletter used as the gothic-styled font throughout, and I can mention mediocre interviews with any black metal bands who are willing to have some form of far-right viewpoint extracted from them. Everything else, like for instance **Sepultura**, is leftist and to be shunned, you see? Information-wise this could be a far worse read, but make no mistake, this is intended to be an organ for 'propaganda' and political points are there to be scored whenever possible. In the editorial, Syrragh says that he doesn't think of himself as a Nazi (but does not flinch from the label), but that any policy that destroys factors "limiting [the] real nature of [the] white race" is good. He proceeds to say that this "perfectly fits to the situation on [the] black metal scene". Make up your own minds, but I'm not hanging around while you do so. \$6 from the Dark Blaze label address.

For a debut issue, *Lifeblind*, from Faz and friend Mike, is certainly something, and definitely no worse than my first. The one-column layout and low density of writing and pictures on it 36 A5 pages mean it's quite a thin read, but the editors cover a wide range of stuff inside. Open-mindedness is the all-important thing, as ever. In addition to short and not-so-action-packed (but by no means awful) interviews with the likes of **Entombed**, **Neurosis**, **Bishop of Hexen**, and **Roadrunner Records**, there are a bunch of healthily opinionated and promisingly-written reviews. There are also a couple of non-music-related articles, some jokes and general chatty comment. Not the usual extreme music fanzine fare maybe, but I wouldn't mind seeing more of this on a regular basis. Give it a go, it can't hurt that much. £1.50/£3 / 7 MONKS WALK, PENWORTHAM, PRESTON PR1 0AQ, ENGLAND.

Heresy magazine's second issue should be the best underground publication in the southern hemisphere. Decent questioning to some well-known acts, as well as a magnificent layout are some reasons why. Many of the pages feature white text on black background, which I'm not too fond of, but otherwise there can be few grounds for complaint. Mostly black metal, but reasonably wide-ranging stuff. \$5 (AUSTRALIA)/\$6 (ELSEWHERE) / P.O. BOX 1710, COLLINGWOOD, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3066.

Hungary, though not a bastion of extreme metal, has an active underground, her own darlings in **Sear Bliss** and a rather neat black/death metal fanzine called *Freezing Flames*. The second issue of the fanzine is a simple-yet-professional-looking - if a little banal and plain - affair. The writing is of good quality despite being a little overenthusiastic and lacking in much criticism. I sense an air of naivety in some of the questions, which are far from original, but nevertheless manage to solicit a range of opinions from the interviewees (**The Blood Divine**, **Dismal Euphony**, **Algaion**, **Falkenbach**, **Penitent** etc.). Everything is well reproduced, including one of the more bizarre cover photographs I've seen on a fanzine. I would, finally, like to advise co-editor Zsolt, who becomes rather indignant in his editorial towards a certain Finn: don't let Mattila get you down \$5 / Kinizsi Ltp. 1/b III/II, H-7400 Kaposvár, Hungary.

I despise political correctness. Not only is it restrictive of freedom of speech, but a new Maoist vitriol which - through the corrosion of creativity and art - conspires to reduce everyone to a common denominator. The other detrimental effect of this pernicious dogma has been the fuel it pours on the fire of all those who rebel overenthusiastically against its teachings. Let's take *The Grimoire of Exalted Deeds'* eighth issue as an example. It's childish and American brand of humour consists predominantly in making anti-gay jokes and getting an immature pleasure in insulting anything remotely politically correct. Cowardly and stupid anti-Semitic comments for their own shock value are far from clever, but the so-called review (the music isn't mentioned) of *Grimoire's* album is the most ignorant, stupidly racist piece of nonsense I've ever read. His twisted and illogical point being that because some of the Norwegian black metal scene have taken to making anti-Semitic statements, the act of Israeli playing black metal is equivalent to an act of betrayal against *Grimoire's* "circumcised brothers". The man responsible states he can't wait to hear his words taken out of context (I bet he can't - it's probably the only thing that makes his dick hard), but they are still derogatory and ridiculous. Unsurprisingly, the arsehole is ever-so-brave enough to use exclusively the suitably inane pseudonym; Metal Monster. He pollutes most of the rest of the review section with more obnoxious and downright cretinous crap too. Moron of the year most definitely. It's a shame, since many of the interviews (*Cradle of Filth* to name one) are informal and almost compelling reads without the oh-so-controversial remarks. Whilst I would never deny the right to print whatever one wants, it's so depressing that tens of thousands will read the base American humour here and be turned on by it. While we're on the subject, I don't see a need for scantily clad women scattered all over the pages, but I suppose that was done to irritate the feminists. It's a pity Bill Zebub obviously doesn't get his hands on the real thing much. Toilet reading for the hard of thinking, but with more maturity it could be so much more. 245 LAKEVIEW AVE STE 237, CLIFTON, NJ 07011, USA.



Sitting in the pub at lunch time poring over Graham Finney's *Intoxicated #7*, I wonder how I can be kind to the man's fanzine whilst still being deadly honest. You see, despite a new computer and subsequent improved presentation, this A5 fanzine has not changed much over its last few issues, and I think more could be done in the way of evolution. Maybe I'm not conservative enough, and anyway the man admits that there's a way to go in that department so I won't dwell on the matter. There are some friendly interviews; an intimate chat with **Bullyrag**, few words from a tight-lipped Maniac, as well as features on **Strapping Young Lad** and **Moonspell**. Note also tonnes of reviews and an absurdly short Swedish scene report - seeing as the scene in question is so sprawling that it would take up an entire 'zine in its own right. The standard of writing is high, but some cheek and arrogance would give everything a real life. People often accuse the Scandinavians of over-confidence, and whilst it's not always desirable in people, in print everything always seems much more



lively when we get away from the 'must be tactful and support everyone in the underground' malarkey. I've been picky because there are no major faults here, you see, but I'm not easily satisfied. £1.40/\$3 / GRAHAM FINNEY, P.O. BOX 2581, READING, BERKS RG1 7GT, ENGLAND.

Einar's *Dawnrazor* second effort is one of the top underground publications around. Why? Professional layout, glossy pages with undiluted literary talent. You have here a comical interview with **Theatre of Tragedy** (find out about the antics of a certain bandmember and a French whore in McDonald's) and quite probably the funniest ever chat with Ronnie of **Gebennah**; their music means little to me but this man's sense of humour is full of excellent self-parody. The editor includes many goth, darkwave, ambient acts which don't appeal to me so much, but the high standard set doesn't make it a trawl. The reviews - of Einar and sidekick - are the best this side of *Isten* and explain why the man was enlisted into the *Terrorizer* ranks (although his reviews there haven't been so interesting). H.H. VEI 30A, SOFIEMYR, 0412 OSLO, NORWAY.



Puru's *Temple of the Damned* is printed on newspaper and has more than its fair share of spelling errors, but let's not be too negative. Its mostly annoyingly short interviews feature some famous names, and the 'zine's age means we see **Enslaved**, **Dimmu Borgir** and **Katatonia** captured early on in their respective careers. The 36 pages are full of simple enthusiasm and little style. Aside from the large typeface, the A4 pages feature some Inca-styled artwork that looks messy and straight from kindergarten. The second issue is \$6 from: ERICK NEYRA, AV. GERMAN AGUIRRE 1422, CONDEULLA LIMA 31, PERU.



I have no price information for *Tales of Beverina's* debut issue, since it was donated to me by someone I can't remember. Being the only death/black metal fanzine in Latvia doesn't sound like it's worthy of applause on that alone, but *Tales...* is impressive, especially as the main editor was but 17 years old at the time of publication. He has good taste, and directs it carefully over the laser-printed layout, which is reader-friendly without being dull. With his two co-conspirators, editor-in-chief Morgueldar presides over better-than-average interviews with **Algaion**, **Otyg**, **Babylon Whores**, **Evol** and **Pazuzu**, as well as several domestic acts. The English is almost flawless, and the informative, witty writing should be applauded. Minus points go for the stapled A4 sheets and the incomprehensible back cover which consists of a sea of mere meaningless (?) sigils. Still, and rather depressingly, it's more fun than most British exports. JURIS SHILDERS, LIELVĀRDES 139-74, RIGA LV-1082, LATVIA.



More a broad-spectrum newsletter than a common fanzine, *Zeitgeist* is compact and neat throughout it's Mac-processed 20 pages. The second issue includes interviews with **Twin Obscenity**, **Dunkelheit** and **A.I.P.R.**, as well as articles on La Vey, Albrecht Dürer and a brief dissection of **Marduk's** ideology (which is of course found terribly wanting). Lots of news items are inside, and with this being a biannual affair that's alright (although this issue is gathering the cobwebs now). Several of the reviews are contributed, and they too are mostly fine and dandy. The layout could be more exhilarating, but the critical error occurs in finishing a very obvious, anti-society editorial with the spelling error: "In a world of sheep, we prefer being wolves!". Very **Darkthrone**. Still, for a mere dollar, it's certainly worth a look. \$1 / POSTFACH 32108, 56044 KOBLENZ, GERMANY.



The magazine *Sloth* (there's an honest monicker) and *Fear of Life's* fifth issue were both sent to me for review purposes. However, I must admit that all traces of said organs have evanesced without a trace. From what I recall, *Sloth* was the debut issue of a forthright and promising American magazine (whose editor - incidentally - displayed a picture of himself wearing a suave dinner jacket inside) while *Fear of Life* was, err, quite good - I think. Anyway, it's one of the more famous Dutch magazines, so you can't go far wrong. FEAR OF LIFE, ARCO VAN WINDEN, OUDE LEEDEWEG 39, 2641 NM PIJNACKER, HOLLAND. SLOTH, PHIL ALTERMANN, 3509 STERLING AVENUE, ALEXANDRIA, VA 22304, USA (\$3USA)/\$5(ELSEWHERE)).

OK, that's your lot I'm afraid. Apologies for anyone expecting an interview with English black metallers **Thus Defiled**, but it wasn't to be. Guitar virtuoso Andy Richardson (pictured praying bottom right), who initially grovelled to be featured here, succumbed to both that deadliest of deadly sins, sloth, and a blossoming (if perhaps not totally platonic) relationship with his Sony PlayStation. Don't worry Andy, we understand: there's more to life than black metal. Seeing as these are my last words in the corrupt entity known as *The Dead Sea* (please note: not *Dead Sea*), I have no alternative than to say thank you, goodnight, and I love you all! All copies of issues one and two were sold out long ago, so don't bother sending me money for them. And finally (of course): fuck off!

