Transcending the Mundane

Issue 31

Features an in depth analysis of Last Crack's Burning Time with Buddo, a tribute to Mystic Force bassist Keith Menser, and Album of the Year 2022: October Thorns: Circle Game, Interviews with Bisonte, Cassius King, Concrete Age, Cora's Heart, Dub War, Frostbitt, Graviton, Great Cold Emptiness, Journey Into Darkness, Leatherwolf, Pyreficativm, Sarkasm, Slog, Vanja Gvozdenovic Depressor, Waxen , and Zero Hour. Live Review of Machine Head, in the studio with Wicked Maraya

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Send me your email address if you want to become a subscriber. I will email you the link for the new issue each month and it will always be free.

Thank you to all the bands who have been responsive and took the time to do the interviews. Liz and Dave from Earsplit and Dustin Hardman- you guys sent me a ton of music for review and there are some great albums in there. Two labels that weren't around on my initial run that I'm really digging are Sentient Ruin Laboratories and Flowing Downward Records. Check them both out on Bandcamp.

Welcome to the resurrection of ***Transcending the Mundane***.I ran the magazine from 1999-2006. I had a stroke in May, 2006 and just decided it was the best time to end things. We printed hundreds of thousands of magazines, 30 issues in all. I prided myself in covering all quality metal, no matter what genre category. I favored bands that deserved attention and didn't care if they were signed with a label or only released a demo. I'm going to continue most of the traditions I established. The non-favoring alphabetical order approach (no, it's not wokeness- just part of my crazy organizational manner) to page placement for interviews and reviews… plus it's that much easier to find specific reviews and interviews, since they are in alphabetical order. I love the combination of artwork for the cover (Thank you Charlie Rappa for the picture), with a few band pictures. I never go with the biggest band on the cover, I don't have to since this is always free, but rather my favorite bands will be featured there. Advertising paid for the printing and distribution of ***Transcending the Mundane*** on the initial existence. It's a different world now…

So we're starting with digital issues. I plan to release a new one the first of each month. The website is up and running (www.transcending-the-mundane.com) thanks to **Internal Bleeding**'s Chris Pervelis. I will continually update the website each week and the interviews will be longer there when appropriate. I'm going to try to have a regular feature each issue; a live show review, a look back at a classic album, gear and tech talk with a musician, and a tribute feature. One of the reasons I decided to get back in the game is because there are hundreds of new albums released each month and they are all streaming for free somewhere (Bandcamp, Spotify, YouTube, or Amazon) and there are usually at least ten out of those hundreds that are truly worthy of attention, but are sure to get lost in the abundance of metal issued each day. My priority for reviews are from bands and labels who send me promos, the best albums I hear as I search out new releases every day, and larger bands that many people care about and would be interested in reading a review. Thank you to Scott Mosher for the logo. I will have a pdf version of the magazine the beginning of each month. I'm picking up where I left off, so that's why this is Issue 31. If anyone has interest in becoming a contributor, want to say hello or offer a suggestion; email me at transcendingthemundanemetal@gmail.com. Peace.

All 30 issues of Transcending the Mundane.
1999-2006

ALBUM OF THE YEAR 2022:

October Thorns: Circle Game

Seeing the six songs from **October Thorns**' only official disc finally receive a proper release with detailed liner notes, beautiful packaging, and some additional tracks from that era, is worthy enough for me to come out of retirement to voice my opinion and support. The time period that this band was playing shows on the east coast coincided with the beginnings of ***Transcending the Mundane.*** **Dream Theater**, **Fates Warning,** and **Rush** were always three of my favorite bands and that's the best reference place for the sound of **October Thorns**, but there's so much more to this band that put them into a league of their own. Creating their own version of progressive music, **October Thorns** pushed boundaries with their live shows and visual appearances, while adding an element of surprise to their music and vocals which highlighted their creativity and talent.

I admire the memorable opening track, "Page One," with its hypnotic bass line and the talent display from the guitars and drums which lead into the impassioned vocals. This is vintage prog metal combining the vocal hooks of **Enchant** with the progressive nature of **Marillion** or even **Genesis**. "Circle Game" continues with more catchy melodies.

"Soul Forge" is the song which best represents what **October Thorns** was all about for me. The head nodding, yet technical flair from bassist David Z. and underrated drummer Joe Cardillo lead into the chaotic and manic vocals of Paul LaPlaca which then settles into a more peaceful section, seductively leading into the grooving chorus with perfectly placed vocal effects, groove. The expressive vocals which run the gamut throughout the song. This song somehow captures every element of **October Thorns**, yet is song oriented and memorable in its entirety, also containing Joe Chawki's impressive soloing, fancy but you can hear every note with purpose.

"Jihad" was always a favorite song in their live set. More straight ahead heavy metal than their other songs with a singalong chorus, "riding out, marching out, rising up…,"guitarist Dave Pando with his riffing that effectively could not be described with a one genre term.

Being a fan of Mike Patton and **Faith No More**, drew me right into the bizarre vocalizations of "Exhausted Minds." This is an absolute vocal tour de force and when played live showed off the vocal harmonizing from LaPlaca and bassist David Z. This

song often seems ready to go off the rails and out of control with its speed and precision, but what made **October Thorns** so special was the combination of talent, songwriting, and diverse vocals which are the most diverse you will hear from a progressive metal band and LaPlaca never had to resort to growling vocals to illustrate contrast.

Though they are no match for the genius of the first six tracks, the six added tracks are enjoyable. "Sounds of Life" more in line with some 70s prog rock style. "Air" has a memorable sound and underlying haunting vibe. The epic closer "Tree" somehow combines **Type O Negative** guitar tone, with an old school doom vibe, and is more akin to some of Paul LaPlaca's work with Craig Rossi's **Drift Into Black**.

I come into this review from a biased perspective. **October Thorns** was my favorite band and I got to know them as great people. They even inspired me to try to secure funding to start a record label with them in mind as the cornerstone to build upon. They were that good, that talented. There was a special combination of musicians at work here. A band that could mesmerize crowds with their talent and entertainment value (remember those "YYZ" and "Pink Panther Theme" interludes), yet leave the listener with hooks and emotion that rarely have any band achieved. Joe Cardillo played drums with **Zandelle.** Dave Z. had great success with **Z02** and toured with **Trans-Siberian Orchestra**, **Jeff Scott Soto**, and others, he tragically died on tour with **Adrenaline Mob** five years ago when a truck slammed into their tour bus. Paul LaPlaca has played with Chris Caffery, Ted Poley, and others and he has a new project coming soon called **Critical Consciousness**.

You know an album has to be a certain kind of special for someone to call it the album of the year, even though most of the songs were recorded over twenty years ago. But that's how great a band O**ctober Thorns** were. Not only did they have the most talented young guitarist and bassist around, the had an excellent drummer, excellent rhythm guitarist and a vocalist with one of the most impressive ranges around.

This album brought me back to when October Thorns were the best band I ever heard. How does it feel to have such a positive reaction to this release? Thanks Brett, I really appreciate you saying that. It's really bittersweet at this point. The reviews have all been amazing and that is validating but it is also frustrating that we couldn't get the band to a higher level of exposure.

How do you feel about the production and remix of these songs? I think I drove Alex Argento a little nuts with this one. I've lived with these songs for over twenty years so I know every little detail. He was tasked with enhancing and improving those original tracks and the first mix done by drummer Jofu and original bassist Rob Carpenter. I've spent five years trying to mix this myself and I just couldn't top the original mix. There were many, many revisions of each mix but in the end, he totally nailed it. I'm extremely happy with what he did.

Do you have an update on your new project, Critical Consciousness? I had to put this project on the back burner while I focused on the **Thorns** remix. I am also working on my bass tracks for the fifth **Drift Into Black** album so my plate is full until spring but those tracks have completed drums and most keys so it shouldn't take too long to complete.

Is there any chance of hearing some of these October Thorns again live in the future? Sadly, no. To the best of my knowledge, everyone has retired from music and they don't play live anymore.

It was exciting seeing you participate in the ZO2 reunion how this past summer with Steven Adler, Kings X, and Stone Temple Pilots- how did it feel to perform those songs and pay tribute to Dave Z.? Lots of mixed emotions with stepping in to sing David's parts, equal parts pride and happiness to represent him but the loss is still staggering. It's something you never come to terms with.

What would be your best memory from those October Thorns years? Conversely, what would be your biggest regret? My biggest regret was being so rigid, some of the guys were still in high school and I was in my thirties. I was really feeling the pressure to get signed and have some success as a musician and I pushed them really hard. I wish I had better leadership skills and could convince people what needed to be done without being a complete asshole. Happiest moments were always onstage, seeing people's reaction to the songs and the unbelievable musicianship.

Since "Soul Forge" is perhaps my favorite song of all time- care to talk a little about what makes that song special? That›s one of my favorites too. Those songs mostly came out of my depression after my first divorce. It deals with feelings of impotent rage and not being able to save yourself. "An armless man, going swimming at low tide..." is the opening line and it really reflects how I was feeling. It still hurts.

"Exhausted Minds" has what I think is the most impressive vocal performance. How did you create this song from a vocal standpoint? That song allowed me to use my Mike Patton influence a little bit, it's so rapid and chaotic and my vocals had to keep up. Unfortunately, it was considered rap by Century Media and even though they expressed interest in the band, I refused to change anything about what we were doing at the time. Short-sighted on my part but I was confident that there would be some type of bidding war over us, it just never happened.

What musical projects do you have that you're working on this year? You have proven to be a reliable, professional talent in the music industry- what services do you have to offer that some readers out there would be interested in? Unfortunately, the older I get, the less paying work there is out there. Even when I was playing keys and guitar with Ted Poley, we'd be lucky to get $150 a gig and that just doesn't pay the rent. I can't leave home for weeks at a time anymore and continue to lose money. Unfortunately, I think those days are behind me.

Any final comments or anything to add? The **October Thorns** release was my way of paying tribute to Dave Z. He is sorely missed and I think about him often. I hope that his fans from his other projects take a listen to his early work and just how talented he was even at 19.

Spain's **Bisonte** are a new band but they play doom metal like they've been doing it their entire lives, well actually musician Vicente Paya has been- he's been highly prolific lately with new releases from **Golgotha** and **Sons Of Cult** in recent months as well. ***Broken*** is the band's second full length and it is a darker and heavier album than their debut. We sent some questions over to vocalist Maria J. Llado for more info on this impressive band.

What are your thoughts about *Broken*? Hello, thank you very much for writing to us. For me ***Broken*** is a great album, it is full of very sad but very real feelings. We are very happy with what we want to transmit and with the final result.

How has the band evolved since *Ancient Punishment*? I did enjoy the psychedelic touch to the debut, but feel this a logical next step as Bisonte matures. The truth is that the new album is quite different from ***Ancestral Punishment***, and that it has gone more into a doom style. But if you listen to the split that came out in July of 2021, with a band from Mallorca called **Milana**, you can appreciate that step towards this new style of **Bisonte** We feel more comfortable in this doom style.

Explain your vocal approach with Bisonte. I feel you have haunting, memorable vocals that work perfectly with the music and your melodic style helps accentuate the heaviness of the music. Thank you very much, your words make me proud. The truth is that I don't have to do anything special to sing in my band, since it's as special as the lyrics we've done. When I sing I feel that I have to show that feeling and that message that we want to give with the songs and I interpret it in the best possible way. I think we got it.

Do you have a favorite track on the album? I can't choose one song, I like them all and if I had to choose just one, I would choose "Of Love Undone." It would be because the letter is dedicated to someone very special who left us forever and whom I loved very much. And musically it's a very dark and very heavy song, and I really like this style.

There's a timeless quality to doom like this, why is there a lasting power in this style of music and these type of lyrics? Because it is a music that is not a fashion. That's why it's timeless, you don't like it for a while and then you go to another style- if you like it, it's forever. Although we hear many variants within metal music, of course. The lyrics don't talk about meaningless things either, they talk about life itself, death, feelings, losses- they are deep lyrics.

You're also with Vicente in the band Golgotha- how would you compare the two bands? Vicente has been a busy man this year with three other full lengths- where does he find the time for all that music? I would never compare the two bands because they are very different, although both will always have the essence of Vicente of course, since he is the composer of both bands. The truth is that Vicente does not stop with his bands, and he has not only made three albums, he has done much more. This year he has made a new album on **Decrapted**, **Unbounded Terror**, **Bisonte**, but also a new album with **Yskelgroth**, a new band called **Sons Of Cult**, another one called **Amon The Sign**, as you can see he doesn't stop.

Do you feel the darkness of Bisonte is a form of catharsis for you or does it emanate from your life experiences? As I was saying, they are songs full of feelings and some of them have been created from experiences that Vicente and I have had. And more than a catharsis, they are a way for us not to forget the things that happen to us in life, and that we have to treat her well if we want her to treat us well too.

Any live shows planned? What does 2023 hold for Maria and Bisonte? Well, we do have a concert planned here in our city to present the album, and some in Spain at the end of this year. I hope that this new year brings concerts and that people like our album, that will make me very happy. Thank you very much for writing to me and for liking our ***Broken*** album, I hope many more people have the chance to listen to it too because I'm sure they'll like it a lot.

Abduction: ***All Pain as Penance*** - **Abduction** is a solo black metal project from the United Kingdom. This album is one of the better albums from this genre I've come across this month. **Abduction** do a great job varying the pace while maintaining the noisy chaos needed for black metal to thrive. "Prayer of Execution" is fast, "Infinte Ancient Hexes" moves along at an always interesting mid-paced, while "Seven Apparitions of Suffering" takes a slow, moody and dark path. This is Abduction's fourth release and ***All Pain as Penance*** shows they are leaders in the current black metal underground. **Inferna Profundus**

Absolom: ***La Era del Caos*** **-** This debut full length from Spain's **Absolom** was a pleasant surprise. This band seems to be the focus now for drummer Manuel Arquellada, former drummer from **Azrael**- the heavy metal band who have released eight full lengths so far. I've never been the biggest fan of Spanish power metal, I know **Tierra Santa** and **Mago De Oz** have carved out impressive careers, but there are very few from the country I would put among the best for power/heavy metal… that's why I was impressed with **Absolom**. These are veteran musicians, besides the drummer, there are two members from **Zanarkand**, but it's vocalist Julio Perez who stands out. He's got a little grit to go with the typical Spanish metal finesse and he fits typical power metal like "Incansable," but adapts to the more intense and album highlight, "La Era del Caos," as well as the melodic "No Quedaras en el Olvido." I definite recommend to the power/heavy metal crowd. **Demons**

All My Shadows: ***Eerie Monsters*** **- All My Shadows** is a new band comprised of **Vanden Plas** members Andy Kuntz (vocals), Stephan Lill (guitars), and Andreas Lill (drums). Just like the previous project Abydos, from almost twenty years ago, **All My Shadows** does sound like **Vanden Plas**, especially with Andy Kuntz's distinctive vocals. **All My Shadows** set out to record an album that sounded like the classic eighties metal of **Ozzy Osbourne** ("Wolverinized" sounds like it could have been on ***Bark at the Moon***), **Savatage** ("Syrens" but not the actual "Sirens"), and general eighties balladry ("Farewell"). It works, especially because these are experienced musicians who have created greatness in the world of song oriented progressive metal with **Vanden Plas**. Kuntz proves his style can fit this music just as well as it does progressive metal and the various rock operas he and Stephan are a part of. **Frontiers**

Arctic Rain: ***Unity*** **- Arctic Rain** is a Swedish melodic metal band. People often compare them to bands like **White Lion** and **Talisman**, and that's appropriate. They write catchy songs and play with class. Vocalist Tobias Jonsson definitely has a voice that fans of Jeff Scott Soto would enjoy. He does a good job creating vocal hooks that make each song catchy. ***Unity*** is a little more metal sounding than their debut, ***The One***. It's a safe album, definitely nothing new being written here, but there is an audience who really enjoys song oriented melodic metal/heavy rock and their singer is just right for this batch of songs. **Frontiers**

A Serpent's Hand: ***Rebirth*** **- A Serpent's Hand** is the project of a very young looking Azrael Luebbe. Azrael has released five full lengths in the past four years and ***Rebirth*** is an album that is impressive for such a prolific artist. The music will get labeled as melodic death metal and metalcore, but **A Serpent's Hand** is better than your typical band of the genre. Azrael is a solid player and songwriter. The music is often melodic but frequently uses that djent guitar tone. Vocally, he uses both melodic clear vocals and growls. My biggest complaint about bands of this style is that they are usually one dimensional, all the songs sound too similar and/or the same can be said of the vocals. However, in the case of **A Serpent's Hand**, this is a top level talent for the genre and a musician and vocalist who is perfecting his craft. If you're into **Periphery**, this is an upcoming band to listen to.

Atrocity: ***Okkult III*** ***Okkult*** is obviously the third of a trilogy so far (***Okkult*** was released in 2013 and ***II*** was released in 2018). These days, **Atrocity** is the same group of musicians who are in **Leaves' Eyes**. As such, I think that's the reason **Atrocity** is much more of a straight forward death metal band these days and much less experimental than in the past. The more mellow and gothic sounding material probably stays with **Leaves' Eyes** and **Atrocity** keeps only the death metal aggression. "Malicious Sukkubus" is my favorite song here as it's a little theatrical and a change of pace. There are an infinite number of straight death metal bands out there, I always admired **Atrocity**'s forays into gothic groove ("Gods of Nations"), eighties covers (***Werk 80***), tech death precision (Willenskraft), and even new age (***Calling the Rain***), so hearing them just stick to formulaic death metal is a bit disappointing, even if they do it well. **Massacre**

One of the best things about doing a magazine, is that I can give exposure to some of the most underrated musicians around. My return was perfect timing for two releases from guitarist Dan Lorenzo (**Hades**, **Non Fiction**) as two of his bands; **Cassius King** and **Patriarchs In Black**, both have kick ass new albums out this winter. For this interview we focused on **Cassius King**.

How did Cassius King evolve from a solo album almost twenty years ago to the band that's already put out two albums of kick ass metal? Well, I love the name **Cassius King**. It's derived from "Cash is king." Band names are hard. Jimmy Schulman, Ron Lipnicki and I released a **Motorhead** cover "The Chase is Better Than the Catch" with John Kosco singing. We used the name **Cassius King**. Then Jason McMaster sang some covers with us and we called it **Cassius Kin**g as well. We recorded a bunch of covers with a few different singers and then we decided to do an original album with Jason. Jason is great to work with. Quick. Efficient. A total pro.

This album has diversity, a couple epic doom tracks and some straight ahead shorter songs- how do your riffs evolve into these songs? I recorded my rhythm guitars first. Before anything. I record to a click. Then I give the songs to Ron if it's **Cassius King** or Johnny Kelly if it's **Patriarchs In Black**. Then after that we give it to a singer and a bassist.

What defines you as a musician and songwriter? My friends tell me they know when it's me playing. Even though **Vessel Of Light**, **Cassius King**, and **Patriarchs In Black** is all me and my riffs, I feel like different singers make each project stand out as its own. I think I'm defined hopefully, as somebody who writes memorable riffs. I know I'm not an amazing musician, but I put my riffs up against anybody.

You worked with some renowned metal musicians recently- Karl Agell, Johnny Kelly, Jason McMaster, and in the past (Blitz from Overkill)- do you have anyone else you would really like to record with? Any new projects being discussed? With **Patriarchs In Black** we use multiple vocalists and bassists. February 3rd we have a **Led Zeppelin** cover of "Friends" with Militia Vox singing. She's amazing. She recently sang a duet with Rob Halford. Tim Williams from **V.O.D.** is probably going to write and sing a song with me on the next **Patriarchs In Black**. I've texted Rex Brown asking him to play bass on a song. Couldn't get Rex. I always wanted to write with Phil Anselmo, but I guess that ship has sailed. I've pretty much played with everybody else I wanted to.

Ron and Jimmy have been playing with you for a few decades now, what is about them that works so well for you? Friendship. Jimmy and I argue, but we love each other. We're brothers. Ron, Jimmy and I have similar musical influences. We are all enormous **Kiss** fans.

How did the Patriarchs In Black album come about and how do you feel about the response? Last winter I wrote the music to 22 songs. After Ron recorded a dozen I kept writing. I didn't want to keep "bothering" Ron so I asked Johnny Kelly if he would be interested in a project. I was honored when he said yes. Same with Karl. I wrote the song "Sing For The Devil?" for John Kosco. Johnny asked Dewey Bragg (**Kill Devil Hill**) to sing a song. Johnny loves **Led Zeppelin** and we both are fans of Jimmy Gnecco. The reviews were pretty amazing save for one or two. I already recorded guitars to a dozen songs for the *next* **Patriarchs In Black**.

Any plans for more Vessel Of Light? We did ten live shows and then Covid hit. Nathan moved from Cleveland to Austin. I was paying for his air/hotel because I was obsessed with **Vessel Of Ligh**t. I still am. We are on hiatus now. I still talk with Nathan. Distance makes things hard though.

Any chance for anything new or live shows from Hades or Non-Fiction? That door is closed.

If you could choose three songs from your career that you feel most proud of- what would they be? Man that's a tough one Brett. I always like my newest stuff best. Let's go with "Beyond The Cellar Door" and "Carving Station" by **Vessel Of Light** and "I'm The Dog" by **Patriarchs In Black**. Tough to not put "Peaked" by **Non-Fiction** in there. Oh shit… maybe "Best Of The Worst" by the **Cursed**? I exceeded my limit.

Why have you been so prolific the last few years? Is it inspiration, time, the right opportunity? Nathan Opposition got me out of my musical retirement. Nathan is a melody line and lyrical genius. We did four albums together in three years. Maybe playing with new people is keeping things exciting. I'm not sure honestly, but I've been on a roll.

When Hades started out record labels were a necessity, what are the most difficult aspects of getting your music recorded and out to the public these days? Conversely, how are things easier for a band now than say 1988? There's just so many bands. It's hard to get people to listen once let alone to give your album a fair shake and *really* listen three or four times.

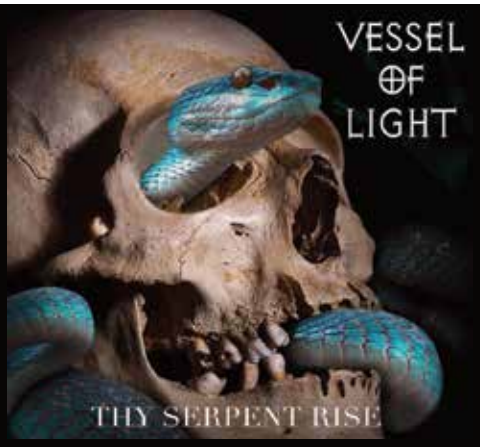
It's easier to record now.

Final thoughts or comments? I'm glad you're back Brett. I appreciate your support. I hope people check out my music. Thanks for talking to me.

Johnny Kelly *Drums*
Dan Lorenzo *Riffs*
Special Guests
Karl Agell (COC Blind)
Dewey Bragg (Kill Devil Hill)
John Kosco Sings On Our *Sing For The Devil?* Video

MDD records

Cassius King
Dread The Dawn
Featuring
Jason McMaster
Dan Lorenzo
Jimmy Schulman
and former
Overkill Drummer
Ron Lipnicki



Vessel Of Light
Rerelease Featuring
Bonus Tracks
Black Sabbath/
Jimi Hendrix
Covers

FASTER AND LOUDER RECORDS
Yellven RECORDS

Keith Menser died on September 6, 2022. He left behind a legacy and passion for heavy metal that was admired by many. He played bass in his band **Mystic Force** and was the creator and organizer for the Powermad Festival in Maryland. It was an honor to put together a couple of programs for the festival and interview all the bands that were playing there. I made some lifelong friends because of Keith and those festivals; including Matt DiFabio (**Cipher**, **Single Bullet Theory**), Paul LaPlaca (**October Thorns**), Rob Thorne (**Soundscape**, **Sacred Oath**), Scott Mosher (**Oceans Of Night**), Mike Tirelli (**Holy Mother**), and Chris Rifkin (**F5**). My memory of Keith, one which many have shared as well, was spending hours on the phone just talking about our love for metal and progressive metal. The man exuded passion and knowledge for his music and the time and care he put into his record label, Siegen Records, showed a high level of professionalism and kindness. I think the best way to pay tribute to Keith is to gather some quotes from those who knew him.

Rob Thorne (**Sacred Oath**, **Soundscape**): I was shocked when I heard Keith had passed. I have so many fond and funny memories of playing Powermad with **Soundscape** back in the late 90s. Keith was a nice guy, always a pleasure to talk with and he was really one of the very few promoters organizing underground metal festivals back then. He's missed by many, and it's sad that his time here was cut short.

Scott Mosher (**Oceans Of Night**): I attended the Powermad festivals in 1999 and 2000 with my close friend (RIP) Chris Rifkin. Both of these shows preceded the rise of ProgPower and really served as something as a catalyst for forging bonds with the tight-knit community of prog/power metalheads that continues to this day - but in person and online. So many great bands at both festivals - some new discoveries and some (for the time) current bands that rocked the house. Keith - whom I met quickly and bought his band;s CD (**Mystic Force**) from him in person - was a kind, easy going and very friendly guy who really put together a great show. His vision introduced power and progressive metal to the blossoming music festival circuit and was instrumental (sorry, bad pun) in connecting us with people will still keep in contact with to this day, 20+ years later. Great times, great guy. RIP Keith.

Chris Lowry: He was a really gifted musician and overall really nice genuine guy.

David Ittenbach: A very sad, unbelievable day of loss. He was such an incredible human being, the nicest guy you could ever meet. A great soul, friend, brother, musician, bassist of **Mystic Force**.

Brent Smedley: A true visionary who followed his own path. **Mystic Force** will live on eternally.

Allen Brunelle: Your friendship, endless musical passion, talent and big heart will be sorely missed. We had some crazy fun adventures bringing **Mystic Force** to Germany and Greece. You gave it all on stage at every concert we played, and where you had so many kindred friends and loyal metal fans come out to see you. A true gentleman, you made time to spend a few moments with each and everyone you were able to. It was an honor to share the stage with you.

Pamela Turner: I love you my friend. Thank you for your friendship and being a gentleman among animals.

Steve Woodham: He was one of the kindest, most genuine and talented musicians on the planet. I had grown accustomed to our two plus hour phone conversations the past 33 years. You will bee greatly missed brother.

Scott Menser (Keith's brother): "My brother was my best friend of all our lives. I will not let you just fade away and be forgotten like many people will. Last Final words. Hug your family, kids, and friends and tell them you love them. Love yourself, your family, and friends and be kind to one another. Life is too Short for Hate and Love God. Rest in Peace, brother. I will always love you to the moon and back. Keith Menser R.I.P. November 15, 1966 - September 6, 2022. Fly High with the Angels. You have earned Your Wings, Brother

Please donate to Keith and his family:

https://www.gofundme.com/f/keith-menser-funeral-and-celebration-of-life

Oceans of Night

Midnight Rising

Dynamic, evocative and powerful, MIDNIGHT RISING is a continuation of the ambient metal style established on 2006's DEEP HORIZON and on through THE SHADOWHEART MIRROR in 2009 and DOMAIN in 2011. Once again mixed/mastered by Joey Vera (Armored Saint, Fates Warning, Engine), MIDNIGHT RISING also features guest appearances by Vivien Lalu (Lalu, Shadrane, Hubi Meisel), Chris Rifkin (EF5, Eye of the Storm) and Stephanie Warren. With over an hour of music that pushes boundaries and bridges worlds, Oceans of Night remain dedicated to exploring the sonic limits of metal music by any means necessary

Through the course of 7 CD's, multi-instrumentalist, Scott Mosher has bridged the worlds of progressive metal, melodic hard rock and ambient sounds to create an experimental yet complimentary style of music that is at once as subtle as it is powerful, aggressive as it is dynamic and timeless as it is modern. Scott Oliva continues to perform in legendary NY Iron Maiden tribute band, Live After Death and The Nightmare Stage. He has also written, performed and recorded with Wind Wraith and Inner Strength.

BAND: Oceans of Night * CD: Midnight Rising * RELEASE DATE: May 2014 * PRICE: $9.99 * LABEL: Ambient
TOTAL TIME: 59:00 * BAND: Scott Mosher: Guitars, Bass, Keyboards; Scott Oliva: Vocals; Alan Smithee: Drums
Guests: Vivien Lalu (keyboard solos on *), Chris Rifkin (guitar solo on **) and Stephanie Warren (vocals on ***)

The Haunted Mind *
Midnight Rising *
Critical Mass/The Breathless Sleep
The Burning Sky **
Crashing Down
Gone Forever
Is This Who We Are
A World Born of Fire *
Wherever You Are *
Reach Me ***

music available at: www.oceansofnight.com * www.cdbaby.com/scottmosher * itunes.com * email: dude@scottmosher.com for more info

Concrete Age and their new album, ***Bardo Thodol***, took me by surprise. The band has been around awhile and they have several releases, but this is easily their most accomplished and original work to date. We caught up with the band for some more information.

How do you feel about the new album, Bardo Thodol? Ilia: We expected a little outcome. We managed to increase our fanbase ten times in less than a week. People are enjoying ***Bardo Thodol*** for sure. As for me, I am more than satisfied. Of course, there will always be ways to grow musically and conceptually. But overall I can see a good progression between the ***Spirituality*** album and this one. **Giovanni:** I am satisfied with the ***Bardo Thodol*** album. We followed the ***Spirituality*** album approach, improving the overall concept and sound. The balance between aggressive parts and ethnic ones is very well done in my opinion, as well as the mix of every single instrument. The songwriting took the next level allowing us to experiment more and have tons of fun during the recording process. **Boris:** Couldn't be happier to be honest. I definitely feel an evolution in terms of the sound production and also finding the right combination of melodies, aggressive parts, ethnic breaks etc.

What inspired you to write about the Tibetan Book of the Dead? Ilia: This album was more dedicated to my personal experiences. The last two years were not easy for me at all. Many things changed and happened in such a short period. I was trying to find ways to express all my thoughts and to release the inner pain that was concentrated inside me. As for the album concept, I think we have introduced a nice tandem between the lyrics and the music. The sound of the album is full of mysterious melodies and riffs that are full of some ancient power. The overall mood can be classified as anticipation of death agony to the insane accompaniment of dances of death. However, there are a lot of philosophical moods that make the listener thinks "what comes after?"

Which of the three bardos would be most fascinating to experience? Ilia: Milam (the dream state); if we can find the tool to help us to understand and read all these messages that flow through our mind during this state it can help us a lot to improve our life cycle and anticipate a series of undesirable events. Samten (deep meditation state); I have experienced it only once in my life the feeling was indescribable. I wish I had more time to improve my spiritual development so which would help me to know myself better and give me clarity of mind. And just the same, the Samten state gave me a fleeting feeling of all of the above. Chönyi Bardo (karma accumulated events); although I have to be cautious about what I am saying. I don`t know what deeds I was making in my previous lives and which ones I am about to make. **Giovanni:** Personally, I am concentrating on the final step: the Karmic Bardo of becoming. The power of thought becomes the overwhelming issue in this bardo. You are blown by the winds of karma in an endless dream where you can't refuge in a solid body. The more your mind is solid the more you will be prepared. I apply this concept to life as well as death, as a constant self-improvement motivation.

When and why did you move to England from Russia? Ilia: It was in November 2014, I think. My personal life turned out so that I had to move. I have not been planning to stay here that long but then I have two children and my plans have slightly changed. I am still planning to move back, for sure. It`s just a matter of time.

I admire how good you sound with the ethnic/traditional instrumentation mixed in with the metal- is it difficult to blend the two musical styles and to have it sound so natural? It isn't easy. And there are a few reasons why. You can't buy these type of instruments and play some silly riffs or power chords in order to make your band sound unique. No. You have to study all the little tricks, and musical decorations and be able to express the characteristic mood at the right time and place. Mixing with metal can be hard. Sometimes you

have to choose what frequencies need to kill in order to have a solid mix. Troubles having the right sound at the local events. Most of the venues are getting lost when it comes to our set. In one song we can use percussion, the next song can be additional flutes then on the third song we pull out our oriental arsenal. Keep an eye on the instrument`s condition. Tuning, string replacement, God forbid you to break something.

What do you feel has been the career highlight for Concrete Age so far? What do you hope to accomplish with the new album and the future of the band? Boris: For me the biggest highlights have been some of the festivals abroad we've played and the evolution of the live performances. We've started to incorporate the ethnic instruments more and are constantly updating our live sets to create a unique experience for the audience and move away from just "a band playing songs one after the other." With the new album we hope to build on this even further and find new ways of making the live performances even more interesting, to tell a story from beginning to end. Playing some more festivals would be great too. **Ilia:** I can definitely highlight some live events with the bands that I have listened to since I was a kid. But the sweetest memories I have are from 2013 when I and my first band members organized a tour across South Russia. You know, the time when you are so young (I was 23), you don't have that many responsibilities and you just enjoy your life. In terms of our goals, I would like to make it short: I want to leave some legacy.

I find your music does not fall neatly into death metal or thrash metal categories- there are elements of various metal styles but it's not easy to label your band- what are some of your metal influences? Ilia: I would like to highlight my main influencers but most of them are not metal at all. Kamal, Enigma, Devakant, Mike Oldfield, Philip Thornton. As for metal, I had some inspiration from, **Manowar**, **Accept**, **Soulfly**, **Fear Factory**, **Sepultura**, **Vader**, and **Testament**. **Giovanni:** I have favorite bands in lots of metal genres, I was deeply fascinated by Norwegian black metal, and I could listen 24/7 to old-school death, like **Deicide**, **Corpse**, **Entombed**, and **Dismember**. I love **Megadeth**, and more experimental music like **Strapping Young Lad**, technical death metal, Scandinavian melodic prog, and I could continue for a long, but generally, I admire well-done music, regardless of the genre or the style. **Boris:** All of us in the band have a very wide range of music tastes, that spans not just metal but other genres (folk, electronic etc) but for me personally my most listened to band is **Tool**, followed closely by **Gojira** probably, I know that's not exactly hard and heavy like you hear on our album but there are some similarities there and the main elements that I like are being able to blend in more ethnic sounds with the metal riffs. I also appreciate psychedelic elements especially when it's using more traditional instruments like didjeridoo and incorporating chants/mantras, which you can hear many other bands doing these days. I wouldn't say **Concrete Age** is psychedelic but if you listen to some of our tracks I'm sure you will get such a vibe in some parts of the songs.

I also admire how each of your albums revolve around specific cultural ideologies and you create a musical interpretation of various ideas and texts- what are some other themes you see Concrete Age exploring on newer albums as the band evolves? Ilia: Well, this is something I would like to keep a secret. But one thing I can tell for sure: this is going to be fresh, inspiring, and insane.

Final Comments? Ilia: Thank you for the interview, it`s been an absolute pleasure. I wish you to find more interesting music that will be an excellent soundtrack for your further journey along the path of life. **Giovanni:** I'd like to invite people to enjoy this album, as a full musical and conceptual experience, and to headbang it like there's no tomorrow. **Boris:** As Gio said I welcome anyone to give this album a listen and I would hope that they can appreciate the cultural and lyrical themes woven into the songs. Ultimately this album is not just for metalheads but anyone that appreciates music as a force of creation.

Italian label Flowing Downward has really delivered some quality goods this month. The latest **Cora's Heart** album, the work of talented and prolific artist Victoria Hazemaze is an expressive and haunting album of melodic black metal with shoegaze sound incporated as well. We caught up with Victoria to find out more about this obscure talent.

What do you hope to achieve with this musical entity and how do you feel about this new album and the finished product? I really enjoyed making this new album, I love to mix metal with synths quite a lot as you may hear in my albums, ***Anima*** is a mix of feelings I had while creating it. I feel happy with the result and I know the next **Cora's Heart** album will be way better than this one.

Listening to your music and seeing your artwork and photos, I see an artist who has passion and is very productive- how do you feel this represents you as a person and do you think it's all an accurate reflection of your personality? I usually prefer to use photos for artworks and yes, you could say it's a reflection of my personality but more than that, I would call it a bag of memories, because I took some of the pictures and they carry emotions from the time I took them.

The bands/projects you have vary in style. How important is it for an artist to explore different genres and types of music? Do you find any particular one the easiest or any particular one to be more difficult to write and record? I believe it's critical for an artist to explore different types of music, this way they will be available to discover sounds they didn't even know that were possible to make, that will also increase the level of creativity. I find it easier to make post-punk than to make metal, mostly because the drums are more simple when it comes to post-punk. Making synth/ambient music also, it's pretty entertaining so I do it faster than the other music genres.

I enjoy the contrasts found on Cora's Heart. I find even albums I enjoy, I won't listen to often when they are one dimensional. What type of music lover do you think would be drawn to what you have created with *Anima*? For this particular one I had influences on **Cocteau Twins** and **Goldfrapp**. The **Cocteau Twins** influence is more notorious in the song "Pétalo", the beginning has these intense reverb guitars and the ethereal reverb clean vocals.the **Goldfrapp** part is more of an influence from another influence, because there's this unique sound that **Goldfrapp** did with her vocals and a synth in her album "Felt Mountain", the song that made me fall in love with that sound was "Lovely Head" my favorite song in general. The thing is that **Goldfrapp** was inspired by Ennio Morricone, you can hear that type of vocals in songs like "La Lucertola (Titoli)", "Matto Caldo Soldi Morto... Girotondo", "Le foto proibite di una signora per bene." You can hear the sound in songs like "Alma Distante" and "Inexistencia." If you listen to "Anima" and "Felt Mountain" you will know what sound I'm talking about.

I love your slogan "music for the soul," listening to Cora's Heart I feel that is an apt description, what types of emotions go into creating music that is haunting, yet beautiful- sometimes intense and chaotic, other times quiet and melodic? I like music that comes with variations like that, music that can make you feel different emotions while listening to it, the duality between euphoria and sadness.

I also really enjoyed some of the more electronic based music you've released under other band names, do you find yourself drawn to some of the darkwave and industrial type of bands and styles as well as the melodic black metal genre? Yes, of course. I really liked those genres: post-punk, darkwave, synthwave, alternative electronic, indie. I usually listen to some artists like **Chelsea Wolfe**, **Red Mecca**, **Ditta Perdita**, and **Stockhausen**. I highly recommend **Death Of Codes**, a band of the singer of **Fotopsia**, also **Laguna Lunar** of Chile.

In a short period of time you are creating quite a resume with the V.C.H. brand, tell me about what you have to offer to the public and what do you think you represent to the potential diehard fan of your work? I'm going to make a resume, cause I have a lot of bands:

Oculi Melancholiarum: post-rock / atmospheric black metal / shoegaze

Cora's Heart: Atmospheric Post-Black Metal with a lot of synths.

AIAA 7: Synthwave with metal elements.

Careus: Raw dreamy black metal.

Micarlla II: Symphonic Black Metal with Vampyrism and Potry lyrical themes.

Luna Pythonissam: Depressive Black Metal and sometimes Death Metal.

Fotopsia: Post-punk / Darkwave

Ecmenesia: Post- punk / Shoegaze /Post Rock

Oblivion Castle: Traditional black metal

Cantodea Dianthus: Depressive Black Metal with some symphonic sounds.

Lacrimal: post-rock /atmospheric black metal

Persephone's Legacy: Melodic Black Metal.

In the future, I would like to do a compilation of my works by volumes, like V.C.H. music compilations, but with every song I have made and divided it by year-months- with unreleased music as well.

The color schemes I see on a lot of your work is cool, how would you describe the type of artwork you create and that you are drawn to? Based on the few photos I've seen on your sites, you present a blurred sense of mystery- how does this image fit with what you are creating with V.C.H.? I try to match the music with the colors and emotions I want to send to the person viewing the artwork and listening to the sounds. Sometimes I choose photos that make people feel nostalgic in most cases- sometimes melancholic or hope. I usually use purple, blue and pink for my artworks.

What's next? Specifically for Cora's Heart and for your other bands? For **Cora's Heart** I'm working on a split with a band I won't reveal much yet. Probably a new album next year. I have done and I have in the works albums of these bands: **Sáasil**, **Thra / Careus**, **Blitzar IV**, **Luna Pythonissam**, **AIAA 7**, **Oculi Melancholiarum**. **Fotopsia** and **Ecmenesia**. I have uploaded some songs of the future albums on my Patreon.

https://www.patreon.com/victoriacarmillahazemaze

Big City: ***Sunwind Sails*** **- Big City** is led by guitarist and songwriter Daniel Olaisen. Daniel is well known for his work with diverse bands as **Scariot** (progressive metal), **Blood Red Throne** (death metal) and **Zerozonic** (thrash metal). **Big City** is song oriented melodic metal. This is their second album with vocalist Jorgen Bergersen and fourth overall. Jorgen's brings a powerful, professional voice to **Big City**. Other musicians include drummer Frank Nordeng Roe (**Circus Maximus**, **Leprous**) and guitarist Frank Orland (**Scariot**). While ***Sunwind Sails*** is a solid album of melodic metal, there aren't many standout songs and you expect more experimentation from this quality of musicianship. However, **Big City** is supposed to be song oriented and melodic (think **Pretty Maids**, **Jaded Heart**, **Harem Scarem**), and as such, ***Sunwind Sails*** delivers on that promise. **Frontiers**

Bis*nte: ***Broken*** **-** Spanish doom metallers **Bisonte** are back with their second album. The first two songs, "Army of Faith" and "Can You Save Me" are an impressive way to start the album. There's still an occasional growl vocal, but there's a little less psychedelic/stoner vibe here than the debut, *Ancient Punishment.* Guitarist Vicente Paya masterfully sets the tone with heavy riffs, it's slow paced, but always engaging. Maria J. Llado's vocals are haunting and clear. Her melodic approach works perfectly in contrasting the heaviness of the music. This is must have for doom fans, and anybody who likes quality heavy metal should also check them out. **Xtreem Music**

Cassius King: ***Dread the Dawn*** **-** I first encountered the name **Cassius King** when **Hades**/**Non-Fictio**n guitarist Dan Lorenzo released a solo album with this title back in 2004. A more focused revival is one display here as **Cassius King**'s second album in as many years hits the streets. ***Dread the Dawn*** hits immediately with vintage classic riffing from Lorenzo is the first thing you hear on opener "Abandon Paradise." This song is high energy, banging riff, and Jason McMaster delivering his distinctive metal voice. It's easy to hear why this guy is impressing live audiences filling in with eighties metal bands like **Dirty Looks**, **Accept**, and **Armored Saint** (not to mention the other half dozen or so bands he currently fronts). "Dread the Dawn" and "Doomsday Hand" are timeless doom laden epics and they fit in nicely with the more up paced rockers here. I highly recommend this album to any metal fan and it's one of the top ten I've heard all year. **MDD**

Celestial Shadows: ***The Tragedy of Calufrax*** **-** From Australia comes the black metal project of Benjamin Penfold-Marwick. **Celestial Shadows** is up to their seventh full length since the mid-2010's and their new album is the best yet. "Xyronite Fever" starts the album with a confident speed and esoteric screaming vocals. I do really like the guitar work here with its subtle intricacies. Almost half the songs on ***The Tragedy of Calufrax*** are quiet instrumentals and a narration, but that makes the five proper songs all the more intense. There are some really descent black metal projects out there, and this is one of them. **Rassilon**

Cline's Mind: ***Land of the Plague*** **-** ***Land of the Plague*** is the tenth full length from New York thrashers **Cline's Mind**. Led by guitarist Tom Cline, the band has been around for nearly twenty years, but since a thirteen year gap between the debut and the second album- **Cline's Mind** has been recording at least an album or two every year. This is rock solid thrash metal. The guitar riffs are professional and vocalist Mike Lacey has the perfect vocals for this style of music. He mixes in some more melodic singing with the thrash styled aggression. This allows him to adapt to the band's melodic tendencies on their songs. **Cline's Mind** may lack the individual identity of those eighties thrash legends, but this is high quality thrash that fans of the genre should know about.

Coffinborn: ***Cadaveric Retribution*** **- Coffinborn** is a death metal band from Hungary. The trio have been around for the better part of the last two decades in a number of death and black metal bands and have an e.p. release from nine years ago. ***Cadaveric Retribution*** starts off with a mid-paced instrumental opener, "Self Mutilation of the Soul," but from there this debut is mostly straight ahead, fast paced death metal. You will find some head nodding mid-paced riffing at times on "Flesh Eater" and the first part of "Infernal Entombment" and "Cadaveric Retribution" is linked to the same mood and pace as the opening track. Some interesting moments, for sure, well played by veteran musicians, but basic death metal with a classic old school Scandanavian sound. **Xtreem Music**

Concrete Age: ***Bardo Thodol*** - This album really took me by surprise. I've heard earlier album by **Concrete Age** and heard the potential, and on ***Bardo Thodol*** they have delivered the best one yet. While the vocals are one dimensional, Ilia has a unique semi-aggressive delivery that fits in perfectly with the

music. **Concrete Age** don't adhere to the sound of a specific genre, as death and thrash metal elements are on display, what makes them unique is how the seamlessly integrate ethnic instruments and sound into their songs. The cool percussive "Purity" and crisp bass playing on "Thunderland" add flavor to a focus and intense album. I understand comparisons to bands like **Orphaned Land**, as **Concrete Age**'s aggressive sound has more depth and diversity than most bands of this genre. The ethnic aspect never sounds like a gimmick and flows naturally in each track. **Firestorm**

Cora's Heart: ***Anima*** **- Cora's Heart** is the melodic black metal project of Victoria Carmilla Hazemaze. This is her second album for this project and has many other albums with different projects and delves into darkwave and other black metal subgenres. It easy to label this album melodic black metal and/or post-black metal, the music is dramatic and the vocals are in the traditional black metal screaming, but it works well with the music. The quiet parts contrast to great effect with the aggressive sections. Victoria is an accomplished artist visual and sonically, as her artwork is impressive. **Flowing Downward**

Creye: ***Weightless - Weightless*** is the third album from Swedish melodic metallers **Creye**. This is sort of a frustrating album. It's not that ***Weightless*** is a bad album. For a melodic metal/adult oriented rock album, it's just fine. "Glorious" is just a killer opening track, especially thanks to the vocal prowess of August Rauer. He's got a voice reminiscent of former **Elegy** singer Eduord Hovinga and original **Mind's Eye** singer Johan Persson. It's a very catchy song, and so is most of Weightless, but really only "Glorious" stands out as exceptional. "One Step Away" and "In the Shadows" are both upbeat, "The Game" and "How Far" are more a.o.r. In style. This is a quality album for the genre, but you can really hear the potential in Rauer and hopefully they give him some more creative material to shine with next time. **Frontiers**

Crowne: ***Operation Phoenix -*** Swedish rocking metallers **Crowne** return for their sophomore album. The line-up consists of members from other bands known in the genre **H.E.A.T.** (keyboardist Jona Tee), **Art Nation** (vocalist Alexander Strandell), **Europe** (bassist John Leven), **Dynazty** (guitarist Love Magnusson), and the **Poodles** drummer Christian Lundqvist). If you combine all those bands together, that's what you get with **Crowne.** Song oriented melodic metal with singalong choruses. "Ready to Run" sounds a lot like Ian Parry and the **Constortium Project** would come up with, Strandell has a similar singing style. Leven must have had a hand in "Just Believe" because it sounds like it could have been an old **Europe** song. My favorite song is "The Last of Us" because Magnusson delivers some ear grabbing and edgy guitar riffs. I wish the whole album had that energy. It's still a solid record with memorable songs, all done by a group of professionals. **Frontiers**

Dead Sun: ***Soul Diseased*** **- Dead Sun** has been one of Swedish death metal king Rogga Johansson's main focuses during the past two years. Listening to **Dead Sun**'s eighth full length (third in less than two years) it's easy to hear why. I feel like there's more of a traditional metal influence finding its presence more in **Dead Sun**'s melodic death metal on this album. The guitar melodies on "Stashed Away" would have fit right in on Rogga's **Gauntlet Rule** album. I know he's saturated the market with all these death metal albums, but **Dead Sun** have delivered a solid album reminiscent of those mid-career **Edge Of Sanity** releases. **Xtreem Music**

Defy The Curse: *Horrors of Human Sacrifice* - The full length debut of **Defy The Curse** sees the Netherlands based quartet (line-up includes **Legion Of The Damned b**assist Harold Gielen on guitar) unleashing their brand of Swedish style death metal. I enjoyed this record because **Defy The Curse** make each song interesting and vary their pace through out the album. "Leading into the Realm of Torment" and "Existence Consumed" kick off the album with two minute songs in that classic **Edge Of Sanity/ Dismember/ Grave** style of death metal."The Tower of Suffering" offers a change of pace and sounds like a song that **Black Sabbath** would have written if they were a death metal band. "The Oppressor" is suitably oppressive and sounds like a train with its brutality at the start. This is a solid debut. **Hammerheart**

Deiquisitor: ***Apotheosis -*** Danish death metal trio **Deiquisitor** are back with their fourth full length, ***Apotheosis***. This is the long awaited follow up to 2019's ***Towards Our Impending Doom.*** This is once again classic death metal, similar to what you would have heard in the early nineties. The song "Deiquisitor" is the highlight of the album, which is solid, not spectacular. If you're a fan of straight up death metal, this is a good listen, but they don't offer anything new to the game. **Extremely Rotten**

Demona: ***Dirty Speed Metal -*** When you call your album ***Dirty Speed Metal***, well- it better deliver what it says. And it does. Led by female vocalist and guitarist Tanza, **Demona** has been kicking around the world (literally) for almost two decades now, briefly changing their name to **Outline**, but now back as

Machine Head at Saint Vitus 11/29

by: Greg Litzkow

So let me start by saying that I haven't seen **Machine Head** live since the 90's. Life changes, moving, kids, etc. A few years back, I got around to going to shows again. I was able to pick up 2 regular tickets and 2 sound check/meet and greet tickets for the show in Huntington, NY at the Paramount. This venue is 1500-2000 capacity and seemed like a great place to see them again and bring my 14 year old too....but then came the unexpected venue change.

Enter Saint Vitus, the 200-300 capacity bar/club in Brooklyn. Now I wouldn't be able to bring my son, as it was 21 and over, and had an extra sound check ticket. After many phone calls and contacts I gave up and figured I would just eat the extra ticket.

The night before, I start digging out all my **Machine Head** stuff and find I own every album besides ***Catharsis***. (Hmmm…it seems I like them) After not being able to decide which album insert I should bring to try to get signed, I finally settle on ALL + an unopened cassette of ***Torture Tactics*** from **Vio-Lence** (A classic I don't think I need to tell you about them!)

Nov. 29 comes and I begin my drive into Brooklyn, mad that my son can't attend. While heading in, I get a call from one of my friends that was supposed to be meeting me there. "Dude, I'm sorry but I don't think I can make it. I came down with something and have to stay home from work. I feel like garbage!" Alright, what am I gonna do? I tell him to feel better and continue my drive. Now there's 2 extra tickets. REALLY not happy now!

Surprisingly, I find a spot a block away, grab my backpack and walk over. After standing there for a while, a conversation starts with myself and a few other people. After reminiscing about past shows, the one guy brings up that he doesn't have a ticket to see the show, only the sound check. There was a lot of confusion with the venue change and ticketing service. I told him I actually had 2 extra tickets, and would give him one when we got in for the sound check. He was happy and I was forgetting about the bad mood from before and looking forward to the show.

Now it had gotten dark and was getting cold and we were anxious to go in. As we were talking, I saw one of my friends walking by. "Hey," I called to him. "What's up! I didn't know you were going!" He then tells me he thinks he only got the sound check admission too. "No problem. I got you!" Now it was a good night.

We finally get let in and go to the back, where the boys are warming up, and are greeted to them jamming "Punishment," from the Brooklyn greats, **Biohazard**. **Machine Head** were playing these huge venues, packing them in, but had branched off to play these little clubs and getting to watch them in one so small, right in your face, really made it special. They finished that song and were getting set up to play another song when they began calling out to someone there, telling him to come up and jam.

"This guy" comes bounding up the couple steps to the stage and commences setting up the guitar the way he wants. I wasn't sure who it was until I heard the guitar and the rest of the guys start playing the opening song "This Time" on **Life Of Agony**'s debut classic, ***River Runs Red***. "This guy" was Joey Z, one of the founders of another of Brooklyn's great bands, **Life Of Agony**. This night was turning out to be amazing!

After they played the song through once, Joey and Rob began talking about the song, the different parts, and he coached Rob on how to get a certain sound by using the technique he employed. They played it again and it was even better after getting to witness the behind-the-scenes that led up to it. Joey brought the energy, and it was so great seeing him play that I almost forgot **Machine Head** was playing after this. There were only a handful of us there, and everyone was feeling it!

Sound check ended, the non-ticket holders were ushered out, we were given merch, and lined up to meet the boys and get some signatures. Rob was surprised by my **Machine Head** shirt from back in the

Burning Red days!" We talked for a little and he was very cool and down to earth. It's nice when you get to meet someone you've admired and they live up to your image that you created.

We had to move on so I went in my bag and pulled out the **Vio-Lence** cassette, asking him if he would be cool to sign it for me. "Oh my God! Where did you get that…..wait, is that still in the plastic?! Hell yeah, I'll sign that!," he said. We also got to take a picture with him and got to meet the rest of the band. It was truly a great experience getting to meet Jared, Vogg, Matt and talk with everyone. They were all great, humorous and I didn't feel rushed or un-welcome. I wish them all well. They went to get ready as there was still a show they had to play, so we went to the bar as the doors opened and the small place began getting smaller. I wound up hanging out with the guys I had met there. It turned out that the guy I sold the ticket to, knew Joey Z and he stayed with us for a while hanging out. Just a good dude. I asked him if he would sign a toe tag (yeah, I'm in funeral svc) and he was more than happy. "This is a first!", or something like was his response. Very non-pretentious and fun to talk to. Then, I went to the door to have them scan the last ticket I had to let my other friend in, who had just gotten there.

Ozzy's "Diary of a Madman" began playing over the sound system and the lights went down…this was it! No openers, no bullsh*t, just **Machine**-F*cking **Head**! They opened with the strumming chords of "Imperium" and when the drums kicked in, it was on. This is what I had been missing!

Next, came "Ten Ton Hammer" sounding tight, solid and crushing, just like it always had. They followed up with "Choke On the Ashes of Your Hate", "Now We Die", "Killers and Kings", into one of my personal favorites, "The Blood, the Sweat, the Tears." Their album, ***The Burning Red*** has always been a point of contention among the metal community as many try to lump it in with Nu-Metal because of some of the rap-rock sound. Well, get over your pre-conceptions and listen to the breaks, the sound, the slams. It is not to be discounted! But I digress….

Then came "Unhallowed" which was written by Rob, Vogg and Jared. It is a great song, with a mix of Rob and Jared's chorus going into such a kick ass groove, with singing and Rob's usual powerful voice. It is a powerful tune that they played perfectly with all the emotion you would expect to accompany it and really highlighted the "flow" with the members of this iteration of **Machine Head**.

The familiar chords of "Locust" crunched along, right into "No Gods, No Masters", with the crowd joining in to sing along. At this point, things changed up and they brought Joey Z up to play the **LOA** song, "This Time", that we saw them sound checking. It was even better the third time, and the crowd ate it up! Joey and **Machine Head** did this song justice. Joey's energy and presence was awesome and I know there was no one there that didn't love it!

But it wasn't over yet. The beating drum of "Old" started and once the opening break hit with Rob's scream, the place went nuts. This was the album that started it all, ***Burn My Eyes***. They then moved on to play another great from ***Unto the Locust***, "I Am Hell." This was followed up with "Aesthetics Of Hate", "Darkness Within" and "Catharsis" before they played "Bulldozer" off the other album that people like to hate on, "Supercharger." I had never gotten to see them play this and it did NOT disappoint. Maybe, in the spirit of that, they went into "From This Day" and proceeded to crush it-"f*ck the rest of you!" The whole place was going crazy and loving what they were delivering.

Finally, they closed with the first song, from the first album, a track called, "Davidian." This came out in 1994 and still holds up. Such a great performance capped off with one of metal's strongest songs…could even be an anthem. "Let freedom ring with a shotgun blast!" Towards the end, I wound up talking with Joey Z again and he gave me his other pick he had brought.

Of course, there was an encore where they played "Man In the Box", by "**Alice In Chains** and "Roots, Bloody Roots" by **Sepultura**, which I had retired to the bar in a sweaty mess to listen to and enjoy. They were good, but the final song for the night was "Halo", which I had to go back up for. Again, **Machine Head** did not disappoint.

I cannot stress enough how good Rob, Jared, Vogg and Matt are! They played for over 2 hours and the songs they played were not little, 3-minute jams. They were intricate creations of melodies, choruses, slams, crunches, stops and starts played with seasoned skill but staying fresh.

Seeing them in a place that reminded me of CBGB's (the bathroom was better here, though) and all the other little dives from days gone by, was great! You were as close as you wanted to be and everybody was there for them. If there is ever a band you like, playing at Saint Vitus, GO!!!

MACHINE-F*CKING-HEAD!!!!!

Demona. ***Dirty Speed Metal*** is a collection of fifty one songs from their career, with a couple demos and live songs thrown in the mix. This is a three disc set and seems to include several previously released e.p.'s and albums. This is the type of speed metal we heard from the eighties when bands like **Sodom**, **Whiplash**, and **Exciter** were first starting out. That same spirit and sound, with a little punk attitude in there as well. **Morbid And Miserable**

Dryad: ***The Abyssal Plain*** **-** This is **Dryad**'s full length debut album. I really like the artwork on this one, definitely unique. This Iowa band utilizes vocals that are so extreme they don't even sound human, while the music is chaotic and fast- sort of a mix of black metal vocals with grindcore speed. In between all the madness, **Dryad** use some interesting interludes (plus the opener and closer) to break up the chaos and set a somber mood. I enjoyed the one minute plus build-up on "Pompei Worm" and the keyboards on "Chimera Monstroso" work perfect with the music. Most of ***The Abyssal Plain*** is speed and extreme, but I find I really enjoy the diversity of those quieter moments, which help break up the speed, but it also makes the extremity **Dryad** creates that much more insane. **Prosthetic**

Falaise: ***After All This Time*** - **Falaise** is an Italian duo (Lorenzo Pompili and Matteo Guarnello) and ***After All This Time*** is their fourth full length album. This is straight forward melodic black metal with vocals that stay in that classic black metal style. Like **Cora's Heart**, the music is the most interesting aspect and the vocals add lyrics and a sense of aggression to the proceedings. Like the previous albums, including the 2015 debut, ***As Time Goes By***, **Falaise** write about the emotional complexity of time. This a solid release for the genre. **Flowing Downward**

Festerdecay: ***Reality Rotten to the Core - Reality Rotten to the Core*** is the debut full length for Japanese goregrinders **Festerdecay**. The most obvious point of reference here would be old **Carcass** and the band has recorded Carcass covers before. The blasting music is in the forefront of the mix, while the vocals are often buried beneath the speed and chaos. As expected, all but two of the tracks here are under three minutes long and the album and all fourteen songs are over in no time. A solid debut for goregrind fans or people who still listens to **Carcass'*Symphonies of Sickness***.

Finistere: ***Only the Tides Are Forever*** **- Finistere** is a one man black metal project from Germany and ***Only the Tides Are Forever*** is the official debut. Most of the eight tracks here are fast paced, raw black metal. There are some songs, like "Doggerland" that makes me think **Finistere** is someone to keep an eye on as M.D. will add elements to the raw black metal that shows he's creative and willing to expand **Finistere**'s sound as it develops. **Human Noise Records**

Frostbitt: ***Machine Destroy*** - I feel like I've been waiting my whole life for a band like this. If you love **Meshuggah** but are not a fan of the one dimensional aggressive vocals, or if you really like the rhythmic and engaging vocals of Jonathan Davis, but wish **Korn**'s music was more metal and modern, well then I present you with Norway's **Frostbitt** and their long awaited third full length. This band is deceptively technical, yet evoke the mood and feeling of bands like **Korn** or maybe **Disturbed**. They don't feel cold like Fear Factory, maybe Klayton Scott's work with his **Celldweller** project or the band **Mnemic** would be better reference points for what **Frostbitt** have done with their albums. This is one of the best modern metal albums I've heard in some time.

Girish And The Chronicles: ***Back on Earth*** **-** This is not the fourth album from Indian rockers **Girish And The Chronicles**, but it is a re-recording of their unofficial debut album from 2014. The band released some songs on YouTube and garnered a loyal following. ***Back on Earth*** was never officially released, even though the songs made their way onto the internet between 2006 and 2014. Thankfully, Frontiers is releasing this officially to the public and it really kicks ass. Frontman Girish Pradhan has the perfect voice for the energetic heavy metal/rock and is the perfect compliment to Suraz Sun's raucous guitar playing. This is a pair not unlike Axl Rose and Slash on ***Appetite for Destruction***, but imagine Axl was actually a great singer. I'm just not a fan of ballads, and there are three here, but all the other songs are high energy, raw, and sound like a band on fire. Very rarely do you hear a studio album capture this type of ripping energy. "I Wanna Get That Loving" has crunchy guitar and songwriting made for a 1980's arena concert. Opening track "Ride to Hell" is perfect to kick off the album. Most of the time, bands will put their best song and then the rest of the album is mediocre, that's not the case on ***Back on Earth***. This album needed to be released properly to the public and this is a special treat, especially for anyone who loved the 80's when bands focused on energetic anthems and image and money making was a secondary priority. **Frontiers**

dub war

Perhaps my favorite band of the past twenty year is **Skindred**. Their exciting combination of metal, raggae, pop, and groove is always fresh and exciting. Priot to **Skindred**, vocalist Benji Webbe was known as the frontman for an equally adventurous band, **Dub War**. After over twenty years, **Dub War** returned with a new album this past summer so we had to catch with Benji and find out some more.

Why was this the best time for a Dub War reunion? The time at home during the pandemic gave me more time as an artist than I've ever had at home, as I'm always playing shows or touring, so Jeff and Richi and I started knocking ideas around and next thing we had enough material for a new **Dub War** album.

Did all the changes that have occurred since the nineties have any effect on the new music and vision you guys have for Dub War? Of course, we speak a whole new language in this time. The internet wasn't even invented when **Dub War** started and the fact that we could have so many different drummers on the album was incredible. Most of the drummers on the album play remotely, due to the pandemic. Mike Bordin, Roy from **Stone Sour**, Dave from **Ill Nino**, Jamie Miller from **Snot**, Spike T. Smith from **Killing Joke**, Mikey Greg he played on a bunch of songs. He's from our home town and was in the band for a hot minute.

Are there any boundaries to what Dub War is creating? Not at all. We don't put a roof on our house. Musically the sky is the limit. We make a collage of love through the power of music using anything and everything to bring the dance floor together.

My favorite track is "Coffin Lid," it's so dark and intense. How did you approach the vocal style for this track? Also, what are the lyrics about? Recently I've taken to not explain what lyrics mean to me, as I think you must leave them open to interpretation. One thing I will say is hiding your feelings for someone or something you love must be so hard and painful. Living a life in a coffin before you die is such a sad existence. Vocally when I hear a piece of music, I let it speak to my soul. I have a lot of vocal characters in my head and "Coffin Lid" at the start was visited by the spirit of Lynn Strait. Lynn for me had such a bite and a menacing tone to his voice.

What do you feel is the best way to try to get governments to do what's right and respect their citizens? Really they will never do that and unfortunately the people are more sheep than lions. Just look at the vaccine, they said jump and the majority said how high. We know where the real criminals are, but very little are prepared to do anything. We just keep taking the bullshit and the slaps, generation after generation.

My favorite Dub War track is "Love Is." Can you bring us back to when you recorded that song? That was a long time ago. Not really sure, I just enjoyed working and recording it. We've never played it live and don't think we ever will, great song though. Just listened to it for the first time in over twenty years, it definitely rocks.

When will *Smile*, the new Skindred, hit the streets? ***Smile*** feels like a summer album to me, but who knows dude. I guess it will be up to the silly plugger when all is said and done. They're the ones that take it to radio. The bands have little choice in the spingle, esepcailly when you have an album full of possible radio songs.

Why did you decide to cover "Stay Together"? Al Green is such a beautiful vocalist and it was a song I've always loved. I tried to do it with Skindred, they weren't having it, I did it with **Dub War** and it just worked. We had a lot of shit from Richi Glover, the bass player over putting it on the album, but fortunately it made it on the ***Westgate Under Fire*** album. It is truly a great cover and we did a realy strong rendition.

From everything I've heard about you, you're all about pace, love and unity. We're living in an angry world, with more poverty and turmoil than ever, what type of advice do you have for people who are struggling out there? Love, freedom, unity, and encouragement will always flow from my pen. As long as the world's in a shit state of deceit, lies, hate and pain, the songs that I'm singing will scream for justice again and again.

One of the most exciting bands I heard this first month back is Norway's **Frostbitt**. The band has been around for a few years and as they prepare to release their long awaited third album, ***Machine Destroy***, we decided to track them down and find out more about a band that should be huge here in the States.

Let's start off with the origins of Frostbitt. In 2012 we were experimenting with different styles of metal after having played in a European style metalcore band since 2006. The last couple of years before that we had been looking into what was the newest and most undiscovered style of heavy music, which turned out to be what people now call djent. So being inspired by bands like **Meshuggah** and **Mnemic** we too started to write in extreme low tunings and whacky rhythms. This called for a band name change as well as new band members. The vision at the time was that we were going to aim for a Nordic cold sound through guitar effects without going the obvious black metal route.

There aren't many bands talented enough to combine djent/sharp heavy guitars with nu metal and make it sound so modern and fresh - how has your sound evolved? How would you describe your music? I'd say djent is sort of like a language. One you get used to listen to, feel and play these kind of rhythms, most of it becomes second nature. In our case it has become extremely ingrained to a point where we make sense of almost unrhythmical sections of music- see the outro for "106," "Cancel Culture" or "Machine Destroy." All of those are almost insensible to hear with a click track on top. This opened up doors for more repetition because each section became more interesting and thus better song structure- we really wanted to stray away from the "riff salad" style compositions. We also wanted to keep doing the things that define us and cut off more of the very obvious references. So we knew that every song would need at least one "frostriff" which is our signature type of riffing with the bouncing between the low notes and the whammed/chorused harmonics which we established very early on in Frostbitt.

The visual aspect of the band, the album covers, etc., is unique- how would you describe the visual component to Frostbitt? We wanted to catch the very essence of the title ***Machine Destroy*** through a clear visual language that left out any unnecessary noise. In the mind of a machine or robot, all that is needed is clear code and programming. Therefore, a minimal design on digital models was the right choice. Although mixing 3D elements with graphic design s nothing new, we stuck to the principle of keeping it simple, and we think it illustrates the themes of the album in an appropriate way.

Any plans for a tour or more promotion in the States? How has Norway responded to your style? Any countries that have embraced Frostbitt more than the others? I guess "big" is a relative word in this sense, but it's definitely a devoted fanbase. According to online statistics like Youtube and Spotify streams, there seems to be a big gap between the U.S. and the other countries. As we have an obvious nu metal influence that's only natural. But the top city is Oslo so there's a decent amount of interest here in the country too, surprisingly. We are looking into making a trip to the U.S. to tour now that we have released the new album and have more of a package that we're proud of with LPs, artwork/merch and the new music - they are much more suited for playing live than the old ones was.

It's been a couple of years since your last album, what were some delays or obstacles you had in recording *Machine Destroy*? How do you feel about the final result? We actually started to compose for ***Machine Destroy*** immediately after coming home from the canceled **Car Bomb** tour, which happened alongside our rerecording of our first self titled album. The process was slow in the beginning, but when the remake started to settle in mid 2020, ***Machine Destroy***

could kick in for real and the songs came pouring out. We actually finished the album in mid 2022 as we released the video for the song "Machine Destroy," but needed time to line it up with the vinyls which eventually got delayed anyway. But at least we got to hype the album up with some singles first. We feel like we finally nailed the sound we were going for and couldn't be happier with the result.

How do you feel about the evolution of your sound and where do you feel Frostbitt fits in the current music scene? I can easily see fans of several different genres of music really enjoying what you are doing. We are super stoked to be able to distinguish ourselves as more of an own entity now, although there's always going to be some moments of reference - there is with almost every band. At least we're not getting called out for sounding too much like **Korn** or **Deftones** and stuff anymore, although the influences is obviously there. I think we found a healthy way to combine all the shit we love into the sound we have crafted ourselves over the years, which is the ultimate goal for most bands. I'd say we fit in the category of djent and nu metal, being on the sideline of djent and the forefront of nu metal - bringing something new and fresh into the old and established.

You must be psyched getting the album out and all the positive reaction, what are your tour plans for this year? What else do you hope you can achieve with this album? The feedback we have had this time around has been through the roof. So much love and appreciation, we have been humbled and couldn't be happier. Thank you all. We hope to get to tour the states and play some festivals this year. We might be a bit late for the festivals, but we have been reached out to by bigger bands showing interest so it should be possible for us to make it. In the worst case we set up a Europe tour through other contacts we have here.

Thank you for your time, please add anything we missed and any final comments? Shoutouts to Braak records for taking care of the vinyls for us, it wouldn't be anything close to what you guys are getting before they got in charge of it.

Reviews continued...

Graviton: ***The Reaping of Eternity - The Reaping of Eternity*** is the first of an ongoing science fiction themed story and contrains music that is truly out of this world. Certainly falling in the djent genre of of music, but so much more than that simple label, **Graviton**'s full length debut demands attention. Featuring two members of **Babirusa**, **Graviton**'s style is best described as chaos. The speed most of this album is barely out of control, sometimes you're left wondering if these are machines playing everything, because it seems to intricate and crazy to come from human hands. Songs like "Serve the Unseen Despot" and "Expulse" border on absolute chaos. There is a little more melody and even groove found later in the album. "Dread Arcanum" sounds like something **Strapping Young Lad** would've created today if they continued down the path they created with ***City***. The keyboards on "Begging the Heavens" take me back to the mid-nineties when **Sadist** released their groundbreaking record ***Crust***. Be sure to check out any of their three videos, some people may not have the stamina to keep up with this ride, but it's exciting hearing a band this intricate and crazy, you never know what they will do next.

Great Cold Emptiness: ***Immaculate Hearts Will Triumph*** - The third full length from acclaimed Maine (mainman Nathan is in Canada these days) extreme metal trio **Great Cold Emptiness** continues their intricate epic journey through diverse black metal mixed with some doom and slow to mid paced time signatures. The songs are a little shorter than the four epics from 2020's ***Death Gifted a Bouquet*** and this is a natural evolution for the band. It's a little more direct than the previous two of this trilogy, but fans of their previous work will once again be impressed by this new epic. **Flowing Downward**

Heroes And Monsters: ***Heroes and Monsters*** - This self titled debut is great eighties heavy rock. The trio consists of veterans. Vocalist/bassist Todd Kerns (Slash), guitarist Stef Burns (**Y&T**, **Alice Cooper**), and drummer Will Hunt (**Evanescence**) have been recording and playing live for professional bands for years now and it shows here. "Locked and Loaded" (is there even one bad song with this title? Hell, Mat Sinner has two different killer songs with this same title) kicks things off with high energy and exceptional vocals. Hell, if Myles Kennedy decides to leave Slash, Todd can take over and they won't miss a beat. "I Knew You Were the Devil" and "Blame" are other examples of heavy riffs and energetic eighties influenced rock. "Break Me" has an infectious chorus and only the ballad "Angels Never Sleep" misses the mark. There's even a killer cover of Sweet's "Set Me Free." They didn't even make eighties records this good during the eighties. **Frontiers**

The ultimate fun in doing ***Transcending the Mundane*** is encountering an album or a band that I've never heard before and they simply blow you away with their talent. The perfect example of this is Australian extreme metallers **Graviton**. They have just released their debut full length, ***The Reaping of Eternity.*** It's a technical, over the top, chaotic extreme metal album with depth and an intriguing story. Here are some questions we sent over to Drew McCormack and Rheese Peters.

How do you feel about this debut you guys have created? We feel like we accomplished something, we hit a fair amount of bumps along the way and sometimes it began to drag. We always had our vision and stuck to it, even through the harder times. Now that the album is done and out we are definitely satisfied. It was a long process but we got there in the end, now onto album number two.

This band is the whole deal, the lyrical concept, the visual concept, and music that is so intricate and detailed- what was the original vision for Graviton? The original vision was just writing some heavy sci-fi themed music that we would enjoy. We are both big fans of the genre and always wanted to do something like it. Rheese loves big detailed universes and stories and this style of music was perfect for an idea that he had sitting in his back pocket.

Discuss the visual aspect, it's stunning and futuristic, and the videos were a joy to watch.
Thank you, the visual aspect is to help get the themes across as a lot of people don't seem to really pay much attention to lyrics. That and the fact that we just love space, planets, stars, it's all so beautiful and amazing to ponder over.

Can you provide a background on the lyrical concept? This story will continue into the next album, correct? Rheese here, that is correct. Currently, the story will span three albums, each one giving the audience a few more pieces to help put it all together. It is about a fictional universe where many different alien races exist throughout. All of them owe their existence to a 'higher' race of beings that are seen as gods and they are who create and sustain all life within this universe. All are tied together through events that won't be revealed until album three and I really don't want to make this answer too long, so I will give a bit more info that is not stated explicitly within the lyrics. In brief; this race of 'gods' are immortal and are empowered with the ability to create life. This level of existence comes with a price though, as they are tasked with being the shepherds of life within this universe. If they do not do their job, they will wither and suffer a never ending life of malnourished torture, unable to do anything about it. They do have their own code to follow, part of which states that they must not become power obsessed tyrants and they must not reveal themselves to their creations at all. If they do, the punishment is beheading with a blade empowered with the same energy within them. The body dissipates but the head stays alive, the leader of this race stitches their mouths shut so they cannot speak, then places their heads around the walls of their main hall. These traitors are destined to exist purely through visual and audible experience only from then on, as the head slowly grows old and withers because they cannot use their powers as they need to. I would explain more, but this answer has become too long already! I will end it with one more piece - this race is not the real gods of this universe, but the how and why will be revealed in time.

The music and vocals are just insane, how in the world did you guys write these songs? How do they start out and evolve? We appreciate that a lot. It comes from all sides really, we all help out with ideas and writing aspects. They typically start out with demos written by myself and progress from there. Rheese has already written up the concept and story, so the lyrics come fairly smoothly once the instrumentals are ready for vocals. I originally wrote the songs through midi programming and then Tate re-worked them a bit and tracked them on his guitars in his home studio. On this album, we had Rangi Barnes (drummer for Rheese's band **Babirusa**) write and track the percussion for us and he did a fantastic job. Once the guitars,

bass and synths were all done, we sent them to Rangi and he did his thing.

Are there any boundaries? The only boundaries are what we place on ourselves, that being said though the concept is quite dark and so we won't be writing anything overly happy. We want the music to fit the story and theme, but we are definitely up for experimenting.

Do you feel overwhelmed by the accolades that are coming your way? What do you think is necessary to happen for Graviton to reach a bigger worldwide audience? We certainly do, we did not expect it to get a lot of attention, so what we have received has humbled us. We haven't really done too much marketing as this is an internet project since the members live in countries on opposite sides of the world. All we would like is for people to listen and read the lyrics and decide for themselves if they like it or not, and if they do then let us know! It's always nice hearing what people like (or don't like) about what we create.

Where and how did you record *The Reaping of Eternity*? Was it a difficult process putting this chaos together into the final product we hear today? Demo versions of the songs were written with midi programming, guitars and bass were tracked by Tate in his home studio, drums were written and tracked by Rangi in his home studio and Rheese's vocals were tracked by Rangi also in his home studio.

What are your plans for this year? Any tour dates? Unfortunately there will be no touring, we can't jam together since we live on opposite sides of the world. We will however be writing album number two this year and everything that comes with it.

Final comments?
Big shout outs to Rangi Barnes for his amazing work on the percussion and vocal engineering, Tom Cadden for the incredible mix and master, Nathaniel Smith for his outstanding guest vocals on Dread Arcanum, Alex Anglis for his help and work on the songs during the early stages and Filip Vranes for helping Rheese out with the concept and lyrics (Check out his project **Slab Of Porphyria**, its heavy as hell). We appreciate everyone that has checked us out and streamed our music, we hope that you enjoy it and if you do, we hope you look forward to the rest of this journey as much as we do.

Northeastern's **Great Cold Emptiness** is one of the most ambitious bands you will find. They have just released their third album, yet another thought provoking, diverse, atmospheric black metal album that continues with the story mainman Nathan has been writing about since their origins. (please note, the full interview is on our website)

How do you feel about how the new album? I went into writing ***Immaculate Hearts Will Triumph*** with a specific goal in mind: to focus on the songwriting and to create, to the best of my ability, a well written, meat and potatoes atmospheric black metal album. The first two releases, ***Miles Before I Sleep*** and ***Death Gifted a Bouquet*** were, in my opinion, bloated, especially the latter. I do look back on them fondly, as stepping stones in my development as an artist, but I came into writing this new album with a mission to make it short and sweet. I wanted to challenge myself and make an album that focused on the guitar moreso than I am used to. The album was conceptualized as one that could translate well in a live setting, because we were planning on hopefully touring in the near future. However, I found it very difficult to get a consistent drummer on board, for obvious reasons, and so I focused less on the live translation aspect and instead on creating a very tight, fat-free, though calorically dense blackgaze album. I wrote the album along with my good friend, and fellow Canadian, Preston Lobzun, who contributed to the more traditionally metal aspects of the album, assisteing with riff development

and some melodic passages. I am first and foremost a synth and keyboard player, which is another reason why composition on the guitar is a bit more difficult for me. Now, with all creative endeavors, one can always look back on the finished project and nitpick. I could have added a violin here, some clean vocal passages there and so on. But I feel that because I came into writing the new album with the thought of vinyl production in mind, I kept my mouth shut and kept the album around forty five minutes. I'm very satisfied with the final product, despite it being around two years old at this point, and subsequently out of mind.

Great Cold Emptiness has been admired for the quality and depth of your music- I know you're a Rush and Porcupine Tree fan, do you feel you are striving for a similar musical career path as these great progressive bands, except with a more esoteric and perhaps more demanding type of music? Absolutely. I'm shocked that you somehow uncovered my utter love for **Rush** and **Porcupine Tree**. Depth is such an interesting thing when it comes to music, and can be considered analogous to prose- I am a novelist as well, in that it's an unsung hero. I find that I value depth in music moreso than a lot of other elements simply because it gives it weight and legitimacy. A big thing for me is that I want every album to be a monolithic event, so to speak. I want to be able to look back on my life and feel where I was at the time of writing. Regarding depth, I find that it's an element missing from a lot of metal bands, as a result of the utter limitations that are commonplace within the genre, with obvious exceptions here and there. Every album needs to almost transcend the material. That is the goal of art. So, yes, I hope to follow in the footsteps of bands like **Rush** and **Porcupine Tree** in their ability to have monumental weight to their releases. They almost feel like films, which is exactly the sort of vibe I want from my own music.

Care to discuss the lyrical content for *Immaculate Hearts Will Triumph.* Does this complete the trilogy? The lyrics of ***Immaculate Hearts Will Triumph*** were written with simplicity in mind. They aren't as poetic as tracks like "The Erotic Waltz" are, but written in a stream of consciousness style. I wanted them to be raw and pure and straight from the heart. Conceptually, the album surrounds a pilgrimage I underwent in October of 2020 with some friends. We went to a small town in Gaspesie, Quebec known as Cap-Chat and stayed in some yurts on a cliffside overlooking the mighty St. Lawrence. As for the trilogy, yes, this album does conclude it. I like to compartmentalize things and I wanted to make clear that this album was connected to the others. It's a three act film, so to speak, and integral towards my own development as a man. I find that I've done all I could with the specific aesthetic that is prominent on these three albums. Also, thematically, ***Miles Before I Sleep***, my debut, follows an unknown man in search of wisdom. That album was written in the first couple years since moving from my family's home in 2016. It's bittersweet because it still carries the precious memories of childhood with it. It's an album about slinging those memories in an old leatherbound backpack and venturing into the world. The next album, ***Death Gifted a Bouquet***, follows two incredibly life shattering events that occured within a couple months of one another: My breakup with my ex-fiance and the divorce of my parents. These are two very similar themes, in that they concern family. But also, they mark a moment in time where there is no turning back. You're on your own. And you are now forced to adapt. The album was written largely during those fights with my ex and still carry painful, yet necessary memories. With the newest release, ***Immaculate Hearts Will Triumph***, we can look back on the ups and downs one experiences during the trials of becoming a man. As I said above, it's about looking at those old fights and finding the power within you to forgive. It's even more of an important album for me,

simply because right now in my life, these themes of camaraderie are being contested. The album's message becomes even more potent to me, ironically so. Lastly, this trilogy is "finished", but that does not mean I have no room left to grow. I say that this is the end of the trilogy because they all surround a key thematic and aesthetic that I want to put to rest. I wish to explore other aspects of my psyche that aren't so rooted in traditionally masculine ideals. I also wish to explore other genres of music that aren't so rooted in metal.

Any plans to create a full length feature with your music serving as the soundtrack? Funny you should say that because along with being a musician and novelist, I am also an aspiring filmmaker. And this is a nice and natural transition to the future of **Great Cold Emptiness**, because I want to focus on integration with my writing and filmmaking more. Simply because, for the past ten years, I have built up an absolutely incredible and monstrously large world that I am currently using as a setting for the series I am writing. Hopefully, and this is my ultimate pipe dream, I will adapt these novels into films. I don't find shame to admit I am my own biggest fan. Because why create art if not for yourself? I've mentioned how every album is akin to a film, in its own right, and that couldn't be more accurate. And going forward, I want to integrate the project into other avenues, as well as treat **Great Cold Emptiness** as less of a traditional band, and more like a collective.

I assume you've spent much of your life in cold climates of the Northeast- do you feel drawn to the cold, dark and depressive climates? Do you feel a necessary connection to nature rather than the concrete and oppressiveness of the city? So, if you were to ask me this in the ***Miles Before I Sleep*** days, I would have answered with a trite and cliche metalhead response. Something along the lines of anti-modernity and how we should return to nature etc. Now, I still find value in the freedom of the woods and the oceans, of course, I am from Maine, after all, but my favorite city in the entire world is Québec City. A big theme of **Great Cold Emptiness** is identity, simply because I find myself in a weird middle ground of being from Maine and my family lineage being that of Québec. North American French history is wild. My family, being from Aroostook County, Maine, just so happened to own land literally on the American side of the St John River during the Aroostook War, in which New France, then controlled by the British, wanted to further the border of Canada to the ocean. Of course, the Americans didn't want that, and wanted access to the St Lawrence River. So what did they agree on? To go right in the middle, cutting my family in two. To go back though, Québec City is not oppressive in the slightest and it fits the mood of **Great Cold Emptiness** perfectly. You get the mountains all around and the nature of the fleuve right there as well. You can't walk anywhere in the city without being reminded that it was built on a cliff. Yet, there is civilization. But not too much of it. I'm currently in Montreal, which is a nice North American city, but a god-awful shithole of a Québecois city. This goes to show how beautiful the rest of Québec is. But I can choose to be depressed walking around piles of human feces and wish that I'd much rather be in the middle of the woods, away from everybody, but life is never that simple. I choose to live in Old Port, where I am surrounded by the reminders that yes, I live in Québec and not Toronto, the city God abandoned. I go and get fresh bread, speak to locals in French, experience my native Québecois culture, in my own little pocket away from the growing modernization so pushed by Anglo Canadians. I'm not one for luxury, and as long as my bills are paid and my indulgences of espresso and French high culture are met, I'm satisfied. some of the songs we've written in this new, electronica dominant style.

Any final comments? Thank you so much for the opportunity to do an interview. I quite like them, as you can tell. Art is the most important thing in my life. It's saved me from the horrors of online political extremism, throwing my life away for some false ideology, and it can transform your life too. Don't follow trends and never be afraid to wear your heart on your sleeve.

I've been listening to music all the time, my whole life. During my initial run with the magazine, I did thousands of reviews, I've heard at least parts of countless (got to be hundreds of thousands) records and my clear favorite of all time is **Last Crack**'s ***Burning Time***. I thought it would be perfect to analyze the album in my first issue back to doing this. All the praise that I know will come through these questions are not hyperbole and I know you must be aware that this album has made such an impact on thousands of people. Just look at the comments anywhere it's mentioned or any videos on YouTube. I certainly enjoyed the first **Last Crack** album and loved ***The Up Rising*** as well, **Magic 7**, **Mind Ox**, **White Fear Chain**, and even the **Cudasigh** records-Buddo's unique style and charisma are all over those as well... but I always thought ***Burning Time*** was the ultimate record as a whole.

What was your thought process and how did you approach Burning Time, both lyrically and vocally? ***Burning Time*** was about giving everything: giving all efforts and treasures away. The culmination of constant thought and reflection. The sole focus for a crucial segment in time. **Last Crack** had a particular way of manifesting creativity. It always started with the guitar, usually Pablo. Then the drums and bass. Then the jam. Then the endless jam. Then the Parts. Then I would focus on arrangement, lyrics, and melodies. The key to my approach to writing lyrics is to give myself totally to the music. I find that if I am open and surrendered to the music, the song will tell me what words it wants. Music, and songs, to me are like a Ouija board.

At what point did you realize you guys were creating something truly special? I don't remember discussing this with the whole band. We were working with Dave Jerden, so we knew that our recording would be well done. We knew that, if he has chosen to work with us, the material must have some validity. After we got the final mixes, I personally had the thought that we may never be able to match that level of work again. I began to think that ***Burning Time*** was the best **Last Crack** would achieve. But I was always guilty of being the least optimistic in the band. Not long after the album was released, I had fellow musicians and friends tell me that, even if I never did anything else, ***Burning Time*** was a great album and I should be proud of that.

"Wicked Sandbox" is such an amazing song. There are a few perfect lines that I wanted to get your thoughts on: "You've really got to want to stay alive in a cave, it sure seems we're heading that way." I feel like this works both in a societal sense and an environmental sense- what was the message behind your lyrics in this song? Also, the final line is so deep and profound, simple- but it ends a dark song on a positive note and gives a sense of hope ("The only brick we can build is love.") Was the intention to give the listener hope? "Wicked Sandbox" is about feeling trapped in our post-industrial world. We've learned how to extract resources for the benefit of capitalism at the cost of impersonalizing human life and damaging our physical environment. The lyrics are from the perspective of someone being strapped into a careening roller coaster wondering which blind turn will lead to the disappearance of the track. The author can glimpse the fleeting present, the arch of the decline, and the helplessness of all participants since the motion has been set into progress. The mention of surviving in a cave is reserved for the ones who are able to cope in the aftermath of the destruction. To this day I am not convinced that we have mitigated the threat at all. And the newer term "Late Stage Capitalism" is a trending coining for where we may be right now. The whole process has made us very impersonal and misanthropic which only further fuels our animosity towards each other and "life" in general. The trend is that we

Here's a picture taken way back then (1978?). Me, Jenny, Todd, our Saint Bernard (Gus), and my Dad. Photo credit goes to Mom.

entirely forget that we are all the same stuff, living in the same place, desiring the basic same things. And if we don't realize this, there will be no love. But that is the only solid foundation of any relationship. Anything else is waste.

Whenever I play this album for friends and family, they always remember "Mini Toboggan" and are immediately drawn to it. Is this song inspired by real life growing up or was it a story you created separately? The music was written around Pablo's parts and I struggled with what to do lyrically with it. I tried various plots and melodies in my mind but nothing was sticking. The music impressed me as "holy" and I kept coming back to a concept of "Chocolate Church:" a spirituality or religion that was purely sweet and beautiful. But every time I tried to capture the concept in words it felt very cheesy. So, I just sat on it for months. It really bothered me that I could not complete it. When we finally got to El Dorado Studio with Jerden I was sitting on the floor in my scratch vocal room listening to the guitar tracks going down, feverishly paging through my journals hoping to find something that would reveal itself. And it did. I saw a quick reflective poem I wrote called "Jenny and Todd's mini toboggan." I started to hum it along with the tracks being played and it worked. On a guitar break I asked Dave to come into my vocal booth. I explained my dilemma about the lyrics and what I had stumbled upon just then. He said, "I love it. But how about just calling it 'mini toboggan?'" Bingo. The writing comes from true life. Jenny and Todd are my sister and brother. We lived out in the country in the middle of cornfields. And, luckily, we had our own private sledding hill (down a cornfield). We spent hundreds of hours out there growing up. Years later I had a nostalgic moment and tried to capture the essence in a poem. It was just meant to be a mental and emotional reflection. But I am glad it resurfaced and brought a full image to the awesome music.

"Energy Mind" - "I peel back my eyes" this line always sticks with me, as well as another poignant final line: "To build or destroy, only you decide which joy." My concept for "Energy Mind" was visualizing myself without skin, without bones, basically a fully exposed brain and nervous system totally open to the stimulation of the universe. Pure energy pulsing from within and without. No limits. The best I've been yet. I always have in mind the line, "To build or destroy…" Everyday it is a choice. We need both. Building is inspiring, and destruction is cathartic. But both are thrilling. Yin & Yang.

"My Burning Time" feels a little more laid back and at peace compared to much of the album. Do you feel this song, lyrically, is almost meditative and peaceful? These lyrics come from a very beat-up place. Emptiness, purposelessness, frustration, and futility. But it turns on itself as the negative turns to acceptance. Yes, you are suffering. But you must have gratitude and you will be better for it. I wanted to embody the striving and suffering we endure and transform it into a cry of gratitude. This is also the theme in "Love, Craig." Just written a little more personally.

"Precious Human Stress" damn! This song always blows my mind. Was it cathartic recording such a chaotic song? "...and slowly we do strip our rampant desires, because they twist and they whip to the point of gasping nauseation"- even if you don't have anxiety, that will push you feel it, but then that final line again... "Cool me mother music without you such emptiness." What a perfect line about the power of music. Music changes lives, it saves lives, it keeps people sane. I think about this song a lot. The lyrics are a meditation. As with all Last Crack songs, the music comes first, then my lyrics. My role at writing/jamming practices was to listen and arrange parts. Maybe I'd persuade Pablo to play a part that pops into my head. Maybe I'd get behind the drums until Philo kicks me off. But the music comes first. And with "Precious Human Stress" I was really intimidated. I had no idea what would go over this song vocally. So, I decided to sit with it and feel all the anxiety that was in it and in me. I started deep breathing and this meditation came to me as I put myself through the song over and over. The dichotomy of my guided meditation over the chaos of the music just fit to me.

Also, back then, "relaxation" tapes and "mindfulness training" was just starting to surface in popular culture. So, I thought it would be kind of humorous also to put a meditation exercise in a metal song.

"Kiss A The Cold" The lyrics are a little more abstract, certainly dark- how do you feel about this song now? The female in the intro, how did that come about and to be added to the album? I was being critical of the things that I feared: Sex, drugs, addiction. I took the perspective of an addict suffering and needing help. I saw people around me who indulged in some dark forces and either suffered from it, or further embraced it. It's a song about desperation. The lady in the intro was a real conversation on a Wednesday afternoon in a basement where we practiced just outside of Madison. There was a full-blown day-party happening at 2pm on a Wednesday. The curious woman visited me in the basement while I was trying to work solo on my four-track before practice and she wouldn't stop talking so I recorded her.

"Mack Bolasses" Why the song title and how is your love like a cauldron? The music of the song was written before the lyrics and the vibe was like witchcraft to me. It is a dive into loneliness. A stewing loneliness that tries to cut directly through the black molasses of mucky feelings into the clarity of Self. I love spoonerisms and still speak at least one per day. "Mack Bolasses" is just a simple non-sensical spoonerism that could be a man's name.

"Blue Fly Fish Sky" This is a stand out track and I didn't like it much at first, through the years I've really come to enjoy it more and more to the point where it is an all-time favorite for me. What inspired this song? "It's a damn strange time for me..." several times in my life I've thought of this line, of course "to fall in love" is the line and is profound in itself, but many other things I've experienced in life, including putting this magazine back together, came at a "strange time". Life is full of surprises. This is one of the rare **Last Crack** songs that I actually wrote alone. Living on the isthmus in Madison, I would walk down to James Madison Park with my acoustic guitar and just strum. Summer in Madison is beautiful. Sitting there on the bench looking at Lake Mendota with pretty girls laying out all around me and frisbees flying. The song just wrote itself. It was being precocious, imaginative, silly and fun all at once. Ya gotta let some of that stuff just slip right by without editing. I actually wanted this to be our first release. I thought it had hooks. Roadrunner thought it may be too 'cheesy' a first representation of **Last Crack**, so we compromised on "Energy Mind."

Who is "Papa Mugaya"? Okay, so this is another personal confrontation of a fear: Failure and suicide. The author is a survivor of the suicide. Someone who cared and couldn't understand why Mugaya killed himself. Someone who couldn't understand the existential void that was never filled. The name "Papa Mugaya" was derived from an '80s dance club in Milwaukee named "Papagaio's." I always thought it was an interesting sounding name so I twisted it into a character's name.

"Down Beat Dirt Messiah" what a way to end the album ("Oooh" aside, of course) what provided the inspiration there? "Down Beat" has a great back story. We (**Last Crack**) rented a house on Penn Avenue when we moved to Minneapolis for a 'larger' scene. This old house had a full basement that we could practice in, and it also had a vintage midwestern root cellar. A beauty of a concrete cubicle measuring 10'x 6' which was perfect for my Slumberjack sleeping bag and my small desk. I made it my home. Put a door on it, painted the door red and named it "The Vault." My private cocoon in the basement underground. Like a kiln. This is where I would sequester myself and just write. In my journaling I stumbled upon an image for myself in that basement underground: Dirt Messiah. An exercise in creative writing that became a reality above ground. "Oooh" also had its conception underground. I was now living with my fiancé in Madison after moving back from Minneapolis. We lived in an apartment complex of about 100 units. It sucked.

Not much privacy and no place to jam. But there was a huge basement with storage lockers and laundry machines. Just before we headed to Hollywood to record, I took my Ensoniq SQ1 keyboard and a pair of headphones to that basement just to play something. Sitting down there alone in that huge vacant basement with a synthetic baby grand piano in my ears made me realize the juxtaposition of loneliness and love. The invisible home we carry is always within us but it is often obscured by what our eyes see.

How do you feel about this record and the impact it's had on so many people? Have you continued to write lyrics/poetry in recent years? I am happy that ***Burning Time*** was created. It was magic. It was impossible. It was easy. It was excruciating. It was before its time. It was unmarketable. It was remarkable. I love listening to it. And I can't listen to it. It was the best I've been.

I can't thank Buddo enough for taking the time and give readers such a detailed look at this tremendous album. Next issue we'll get guitarist Paul Schluter's perspective on the creation of **Last Crack**'s 1991 album, ***Burning Time***.

Hold Me Down: ***Powerless*** **-** Out of the ashes of American (two mid-2010's albums- ***Out of the Ashes of*** and ***Step***) comes Virginia's industrial metallers **Hold Me Down** and their follow up to the 2019 self titled e.p. ***Powerless*** is a brutal industrial metal album. This is like **Godflesh** made brutal and they make **Fear Factory** sound like cream puffs. Most of the album is instrumental and pounding, when there are vocals they are more in the demonic black metal style. The powerful percussion is the main instrument, while the guitars add to the mood and aren't the driving force of **Hold Me Down**. There are some different paced tracks, and I feel the highlight is "Money and Bodies" which just builds in intensity and ends in madness. This is the type of album I've been waiting for years to hear. Industrial sounds can make for an absolutely devastating album when mixed with extreme metal influences. **Sentient Ruin**

Hollow Hour: ***Till the Grey Skies Are Gone - Till the Grey Skies Are Gone*** is the debut album from modern progressive rock/metallers **Hollow Hour**. I've read some frequent comparisons to **Leprous**, which is fairly accurate, I also thought of **Teramaze** as another point of reference. There's a similar level of sophistication to the music and vocals here. The vocalist is talented and delivers the necessary talent to match the quality of the music- only complaint could be that he never seems to push the envelope or go outside his comfort zone, let me remind you, that's not a serious issue, just a thought while listening to this album. Among the highlights are "Cipher" which a cool hypnotic riff and "Neon" with its trippy but subtle electronic percussion. "Summer Sun" sounds like it would be a great live song and reminds me a bit of a Tool song. It's not easy delivering a high quality song oriented progressive metal album, but **Hollow Hour** have done so with this impressive debut.

Howling Void: ***Into Darkness Ever More Profound*** **-** San Antonio's **The Howling Void** is the solo project of Ryan Wilson. He has released eight full lengths of slow paced doom metal. Most of this record is instrumental and I feel like the drums are the dominating force here, though there is the heavy guitars and growling vocals you expect from this genre. This band is the antithesis of Ryan's work with **Intestinal Disgorge** and their faster paced brutal death grind. This album contains four long songs and a mostly one dimensional approach, but if you're into the funeral death doom of bands like **Evoken** and **Ahab**, this is for you. **Funere**

Hypno5e: ***Sheol*** **-** French tech metallers **Hypno5e** have been around for twenty years and this is their sixth full length record. Long time members Emmanuel Jessua (vocals, guitars) and Jonathan Maurois (guitars) are joined by a new rhythm section for this release of ***Sheol***. If you're familiar with their history, you know that this band is unpredictable. They're released a soundtrack album and an acoustic album in recent years. ***Sheol*** is adventurous and exciting. You may hear some **Gojira** or **Meshuggah** to their angular riffs and brutal sound, yet more than half this record is more quiet, a trio of string players, and melodic sections are later punctuated with intense build up and release. There's a distinct contrast between their lengthy quiet passages and the brutal, precise and technical extremity. **Hypno5e** has shown potential for greatness before and ***Sheol*** sees them deliver a long, always interesting album of contrasts, with a singer who is talented enough to pull it all off.

Immortalizer: Born for Metal – If this debut album is any indication, Canada's Dave D.R. was certainly ***Born for Metal***. "Out on the Streets" kicks things off and I'm instantly taken back to **L.A. Guns**' debut album from 1988 with its raw energy, but melodic rock sensibilities. "Cut Loose" has a variation of the **Black Sabbath**'s "Heaven and Hell" riff. The anthemic "We Were Born for Metal" and tribute "Lemmy" follow and this is pure unadultered eighties pleasure. This is a guitar driven record, with solid vocals and a timeless sound. The songs get longer toward the end of the album, closing with "Fallen" an enjoyable epic.

Issa: ***Lights of Japan*** Frontiers had two unexpected killer records from **Heroes And Monsters** and **Girish And The Chronicles**, so it was a bit of a letdown hearing this album comparatively. Issa is Norwegian vocalist Isabell Oversveen and ***Lights of Japan*** is her seventh full length since 2010. While she is talented and these are professional musicians and they're writing catchy songs, I just did not get drawn in. Isabell's vocals don't hold that charm for me. There's no metal grit, there's no beautiful singing, there's no undeniable emotion- things that a singer like Anneke Van Giersbergen has in abundance. The same can be said for the music. Just nothing special that stood out, although **"Fight to Survive" was a stand out track. Frontiers**

Jenner: ***To Live is to Suffer*** **-** This is the reissue of their 2017 debut and only official record, ***To Live is to Suffer***. This trio of females from Serbia deliver an album of classic speed metal which will take you back the eighties when this type of music was made popular by bands like **Raven**, **Whiplash**, and **Razor**. ***To Live is to Suffer*** speeds ahead at a fast pace from start to finish, the vocals are perfect for this style of music and you feel like this would have been huge if it were released in 1985. The galloping "The Heath is Coming Again," the melodic metal of opener "Factory of Death," and the straight forward speed metal of "Demon's Call" are all highlights here. **Fighter**

Katatonia: ***Sky Void of Stars*** **-** Led by original members Jonas Renske and Andres Nystrom, **Katatonia** has been around for over thirty years and ***Sky Void of Stars*** is their twelfth full length album. One thing you can expect, much like the career of **Anathema**, each **Katatonia** album stands out as an individual album that is different than what's come before. My favorite era of **Katatonia** would be mid-career when the combination of the original heaviness was combined with Renske's developing clear singing and he expressed intense emotions on songs like "The Sleeper" and "I Break." ***Sky Void of Stars*** is a further extension of what **Katatonia** achieved with ***City Burial,*** as it's more melodic, more dreamy, and less edgy. The dreamy vocals of "Austerity" and that great riff on "Author" are some of the better elements here. Closer "No Beacon to Illuminate Our Fall" is a solid track, but much of ***Sky Void of Stars*** doesn't live up to to this band's capabilities. "Birds" sounds like **Katatonia**, but it lacks the intense emotion of their better work. "Drab Moon" (drab song too) and "Impermanence" lack any identity and are not up to the quality we expect from **Katatonia**. Their last three original full length albums always had a couple of stand out tracks, I'm just not hearing that same quality here, don't get me wrong, ***Sky Void of Stars*** is a quality record in its own merit, but you know they can be more exciting and the emotion that drives their best material is lacking here. **Napalm**

Lansdowne: ***Medicine*** **-** To announce their addition to the AFM Records roster, this is a twelve song compilation from Boston rockers **Lansdowne**. They sound a lot like some of the bands they've opened for: **Creed**, **Puddle Of Mudd**, **Pop Evil**, etc.) I hear some Staind in there as well. They champion themselves working man's rock. There's a southern vibe at times. This is definitely a hit or miss mix of songs. I do like the slight electronic rock influence on opener "Medicine" and "Conquer Them All" is very memorable. "Watch Me Burn" sounds like a **Creed** song. Several other songs are not that interesting. If you're into this style of music or these bands that I referenced, you should check this band out, but if not- this isn't the album that would make you want to listen to this style of music. **AFM**

Lattermath: ***Winter's Painting*** - And what a fascinating painting this is. **Lattermath**'s long awaited follow-up to their 2019 self-titled debut is an impressive piece of work. The best comparison I can make here is **Tesseract**. Daniel Tompkins (**Tesseract**, **Skyharbor**, **Haji's Kitchen**) is perhaps the best of this type of music, but the vocals of Eli Cutting are nearly as good here. Mostly clean singing, with the occasional aggressive death growls (like toward the end of "The Vice"). Another highlight is the bass playing of Kilian Duarte. He's got a crisp up front bass jamming on songs like "Like Waves," "Waking Life," and my favorite track here, "The Vice." "Nigh" is downbeat and dark, despite the memorable, melodic vocals. There is a hint of djent guitar here and there on songs like "One by One." Boston's **Lattermath** are building something really special here. This band has created one of the best albums I've heard recently and they could be the next big thing.

Leatherwolf: ***Kill the Hunted*** **-** "Hit the Dirt" kicks off the new **Leatherwolf** album in fine fashion. It's high energy, in your face heavy metal. The chorus recalls those days of "Street Ready" and "Hear Me Calling," but the high energy straight ahead delivery hasn't been heard from them since their first independent debut from back in 1984. The rest of the album s just fine, it is impossible to match the high quality of "Ht the Dirt"- which just might be the best song I've heard this year. Drummer Dean Roberts is the only original member and new vocalist Keith Adamiak fits in perfectly. This isn't the same **Leatherwolf** from the late eighties, but it's still quality heavy metal.

Mantiel: ***Vestiges Engraved in Frozen Mysticism History*** - This is another of a number of projects from Chile's Lord Valtgryftake (**Pyreficativm**, **Rundgard**). ***Vestiges Engraved in Frozen Mysticism History*** is their fourth album and it will appeal to fans of the early nineties black metal roots. You know the sound, esoteric and extreme, low production, raw sound. **Mantiel** will turn down the noise and use quiet atmospheric passage like "Wisdom of the Ancients." Definitely a must listen for old school black metal fans. **Inferna Profundus**

One of the reasons why I was inspired to put ***Transcending the Mundane*** back together again was one of my best friends, Brett Clarin. Brett #1 is well known on Long Island for his death metal band **Sorrow** and his legendary store and record label, None Of The Above Records. The man has even starred in an independent film and done stand up comedy. His band **Journey Into Darkness** has released two great albums of symphonic black metal with doom and death influences and Brett has breaking news on a new **Sorrow** release.

What do you feel is the core sound of Journey Into Darkness? Who do you think would be a fan of your music? The overall feel is symphonic black death metal I've tried to meld what I consider the best elements of each style. Those who like symphonic black metal or symphonic death metal will like it of course, but I would hope that fans of any extreme metal can find something they like. It's melodic and symphonic but is just as heavy and extreme as any black and death metal. The symphonic elements are there to enhance the sound, not take it over so even those who don't usually like symphonic metal might still like this. There are a few synth style tracks on the earlier albums that may not be for everyone, but if you like dungeon synth or dark ambient then you'll like those tracks too.

You put out two excellent, intricate albums in as many years- did you feel a sense of inspiration? Why was it the right time to record these Journey Into Darkness albums? I was inspired by age, getting older that is. For twenty five years I started and stopped **Journey Into Darkness** and in 2018 I turned fifty. I realized that if I didn't do it soon, I might never do it. So, I upgraded all my equipment, and got serious starting to write music again. I had a few songs that were written over the years, so I had a head start, but those needed to be updated a bit and I wrote a lot of new material too and by 2019 I had enough to start recording again. The pandemic did not really factor in even though I did those two albums over the worst part of the pandemic.**I know you love Emperor's *In the Nightside Eclipse* and enjoy the instrumental tracks of Morbid Angel- what is it about this type of ,music that has drawn you in as a fan?** Those are perfect references. **Morbid Angel**'s 'Doomsday Celebration' is such an amazing piece of music. That was my biggest inspiration for starting up **Journey Into Darkness**, I wanted a full album of that type of music. **Emperor***'s In the Nightside Eclipse* is the pinnacle of symphonic black metal. The music is all encompassing, it just draws me in and places me somewhere else. It's heavy, extreme, emotional and has a thick atmosphere. Having symphonic elements adds a dimension to the music that makes the sound complete. You're able to add melody and harmony without sacrificing heaviness or intensity. Of course, not all symphonic metal bands keep it heavy, there's plenty of symphonic bands I don't like.

You're currently into creating soundtrack music, why has this always been an appeal for you? Lots of soundtrack music is powerful and emotional, and some of it can be very dark I always felt that a lot of what I write could be ported over for soundtrack use. So, in the past few years I have gotten serious about it. The feeling you get from the music watching a movie is deep, I want to be able to have that effect on others.

Now that it's been over two decades, how do you feel when you look back at None of the Above and how much of an impact it had on Long Island? What would be your fondest memories? Reminiscing about the store and the label is both pleasant and sad. The store had a big effect on Long Island, at least I think it did. It was a place for local bands to promote themselves and for east Long Islanders to find music they could not find anywhere close. The label had an effect, but I don't think nearly as much as the store. Although, I think of course that every release was great. I have many fond memories, from hanging out with people in the store to attending record release parties. Now the sad part, aside from missing being in the store, some of the memoires are working together with Tom. We had so many great times together, from eating Dominos pizza from next door, talking shit about people, including ourselves, to opening boxes with new releases in them. I dearly miss him.

You were also a part of Sorrow, are there any plans to release new music or reissue the old material? Some new stuff happening. The **Apparition** ***Human Fear*** demo was recently released on ten inch vinyl by Xtreem Music and our albums are now on

Spotify. But the big news is that we are releasing a new album in a few months. Back in 1992, we had another full album written but it was never recorded properly. So, last year we decided to record that album. The songs are from 1992, but the recording will be all new. If that does well, I am sure the older albums will be reissued.

With both Sorrow and Journey Into Darkness I appreciated that you could understand all the lyrics despite the extreme vocals, how important is the lyrical content to the music you create? Do you find similar themes recurring with Journey Into Darkness? I am happy to hear that. The lyrics are very important to me and being able to understand them in the song is something I prefer. When the lyrics have meaning it really makes the music more intense and personal. I spend a lot of time writing lyrics, I want the meaning to come across in the music to make the listening experience cathartic. There are recurring themes with **Journey Into Darkness**. A lot of the lyrics are existential and deal with the absurdity of the universe and life in it. There are some basic themes, like anti religion, and humanity being awful, but the main thread is more about dealing with our brief and cruel existence.

Do you think the metal scene is better now than it was in the 90's? All the changes that have occurred in the industry has created a totally different reality for metal fans and bands compared to 25 years ago. And where do you see this scene heading in the future? I can't say if the scene is better now, I am way more isolated, but it has changed of course. In the 90s, you had to hunt for new music and there was much less to choose from. These days, you can find 100 new bands a day, which is good and bad. The selection of music is infinite, and I do think there are plenty of great new bands. But there is also a lot of garbage to sift through. I guess the biggest difference though, is that in the 80s and 90s, there was nothing mainstream about death and black metal whereas these days, it's all over the place. Even though the music and imagery has actually become more extreme, it's lost its shock value. It's become a lot of show and theatrics and conformity, and I always felt the music was more serious and personal.

What does the future hold for Journey Into Darkness? Any plans to record again in the near future?

I've been a little behind in writing new music for **Journey Into Darkness**. I've been busy with the trailer and cinema stuff. But I do have new material, and I will release something this year.

https://journeyintodarkness.bandcamp.com/

Reviews continued...

Maze Of Sothoth: ***Extirpated*** Italian technical death metallers **Maze Of Sothoth** have been around for well over ten years and they sound like the well seasoned veteran band they are. They have a previous release, 2017's ***Soul Demise***, but ***Extirpated*** is a great album. The vocals are straight up death metal, average overall, but the music here is exceptional. I am reminded of **Morbid Angel**'s second or third album while listening to **Maze Of Sothoth**, but they are certainly not clones and have their own identity. The first thing I noticed about this album is opener "The Unspeakable" which has a unique guitar solo. "The Revocation Dogma" reveals the quirky side to it and that's what makes **Maze Of Sothoth** much more interesting than your typical death metal. "Blood Tribute" is the next highlight with an extraordinary two minutes before blasting and going back to the mid-paced intrigue. There's some really cool guitar and drum work on "Blasphemous Ritual." "Sanctae Inqvistionis" is another song that brings back that **Morbid Angel** vibe, not unlike "Where the Slime Live." This is pushing the boundaries of death metal and creating something fascinating. **Everlasting Spew**

Mechina: ***Cenotaph*** **-** Chicago trio **Mechina** have been putting out high quality music for about twelve years now. The amazing thing is not only do they get better with each album, they also continue to solidify a style that has become their own. I know there's some comparisons to **Fear Factory**- and maybe that applies to early work, but the ethereal, dreamy, but still heavy sound transcends metal into a genre all their own. **Mechina** is not industrial, not symphonic, not metal- but those elements are encompassed into their sound. Thing is with **Mechina**, this is not a band that will immediately hit you. It takes a few listens to absorb, but this band is well worth your time. "Starlifter" and "The Grand Hunt" are two songs that sink in right away. This is a band that has a loyal following, but they should be huge.

Metal fans remember **Leatherwolf** and their triple axe attack from the late eighties. The band combined huge choruses with blistering guitar solos and should have been destined for fame. After a pair of major labels releases, **Leatherwolf** went a little over ten years before returning with a new album. We caught up with drummer Dean Roberts to find out about this brand new line-up and their new album, ***Kill the Hunted***.

How does it feel to have the new album out to the public? Both excitement and relief. Relief because so much went into making ***Kill the Hunted*** while dealing with unforeseen obstacles along the way, including line-up changes. When we started writing, it was actually gonna be the classic line-up, minus Mike Olivieri. Carey (Howe) bailed early on for reasons that might have had to do with his legal troubles (google "Carey Howe FTC") which I only became aware of later on. Then Paul (Carman) bowed out because he couldn't make time to do the album. So we ended up getting Barry Sparks (**MSG**, **Yngwie**, **Dokken**) instead which worked out great because he's an amazing player. Unfortunately, we also had to part ways with Geoff Gayer who went m.i.a. for weeks when he was supposed to do his guitars. Geoff is a brilliant musician but also his own worst enemy because he can't get a handle on his personal demons. So Rob Math ended up doing the bulk of the guitars, with our touring member Luke Man and special guest Joel Hoekstra from **Whitesnake**/**TSO** doing the rest. Personally, I'm stoked how the album turned out and the feedback from fans and press has been very positive for the most part.

"Hit the Dirt" is the perfect song to open the album, how did this song come together and can you see this being a great song to play live? We have not decided which of the new songs we're gonna play live but 'Hit the Dirt' is certainly a strong candidate. It`s a kick ass tune. Musically, the song originated with Geoff and our new singer, Keith Adamiak, wrote the lyrics.

W**hat happened during the World Asylum/New World Asylum era? Why didn't Wade fit into the band and how did Michael end up back in?** It wasn't so much that Wade didn't fit. We ended up parting ways sometime after playing the Bang Your Head Festival in Germany over non-musical issues. At the same time Michael expressed an interest in re-joining **Leatherwolf**. He actually came around to do some backing vocals on ***World Asylum*** and liked what he heard. When he did officially re-join, we ended up re-doing the vocals and re-issued the album as ***New World Asylum*** as to reflect the new line-up at the time.

I've heard Michael's solo albums and you can tell he's in a different place musically, how did you find Keith and how do you feel about his contributions to the new album? Yeah, Mike is definitely in a different place musically and has been for a while. When he was still in the band he would say, "guys, I'm not a metal singer!" He is really more into the bluesy type of thing- he's been doing stuff with **Great White** live for a while now, too. I think for the last few years being in **Leatherwolf** was more about playing rock star over in Europe than anything else for Mike. He really wasn't committed to putting in the necessary work such as rehearsing properly for tours. Once we split from Mike I called an engineer friend of mine and asked him if he knew of any good singers. One of the people he recommended was Keith. When he came over and put down a test vocal for “Only the Wicked”we were all pretty impressed. This dude definitely had some serious pipes. I think Keith's vocal approach really fits the heavier direction we took on ***Kill the Hunted***- he's got all the ingredients you want in a metal singer: range, power, melody,

It's a different world in the music industry now- how does Leatherwolf survive in the current musical environment? Will you be touring or playing live shows in support of *Kill the Hunted?* We want to play live as much as possible. Unfortunately, that is becoming more and more difficult for smaller bands like us due to the rising cost of everything connected to touring. We all have jobs - I own my own business - because **Leatherwolf** is not paying the bills for any of us at this point.

As the producer of this album; what were the most important things you wanted to capture? The main thing I wanted to achieve was to sound like **Leatherwolf** is supposed to sound in my opinion. And play with high quality musicians that can capture that vibe and play my drums to the best of my ability. We got real lucky to go back to Randy Burns to get that mix. He did a phenomenal job. I think that this record turned out better than I thought it would when we first began working on it.

Do you feel confident this is a line-up that will last? I really like the line-up we have right now - it's a good mix of experience and youth. I hope we can keep it together for the foreseeable future but, ya never know... this band has undergone a bunch of line-up changes in the last 20 years or so.

It's been over thirty years and you have five albums- fans may be frustrated with only two albums since *Street Ready*, but it's clear that you value quality over quantity- when you reflect on your career, do you have any regrets or are there any important lessons you feel you have learned? I wish we had a few more albums out but we definitely value quality over quantity. There is no point in releasing albums for the sake of having a new album out, especially when album sales are at an all-time low. There are definitely some regrets, things we did or did not do that could've helped **Leatherwolf** become more successful. For one, signing with Island Records at the time was a bad move. They weren't a metal label but we figured the fact that they didn't already have twenty five other metal bands might work in our favor. It didn't and their lack of support caused a lot of frustration within the band. We also should have focused more on Europe where we were received well. But, it is what it is - it's pointless to indulge in coulda shoulda woulda.

Reviews continued...

Memoriam: ***Rise to Power*** – British death metallers return with their fifth full length already. Featuring members who have spent time with **Benediction** and **Bolt Thrower** should give you an idea on what **Memoriam** have to offer. They also take on the war themes prevalent from Karl Willett's much missed **Bolt Thrower**. The is straight forward middle paced old school death metal with those riffs that aren't far from thrash at times. There is a maturity to their songwriting that makes each track feel like a story in itself. Must have for death metal fans, worth checking out for other metal fans who haven't already. **Reaper**

Misanthrope: ***Les Declinistes*** - French death metallers **Misanthrope** have always been one of my favorite underground metal bands. ***Les Delinistes*** is their twelfth full length and it contains four re-recorded songs from their early nineties era. I feel like it takes a few songs from ***Les Declinistes*** before the more avant-garde nature of **Misanthrope**'s best side starts to come out. S.A.S. De L'Argiliere's **Celtic Frost** (***Into the Pandemonium***) vocal influence starts to come through and their more intricate style as well. Bassist Jean Jacques Moreac always impresses with some slap and technical playing and he particularly shines on "Declin Garganuesque." **Misanthrope** show a flair for the theatrical on the re-recording of "Le Roman Noir." It's cool to hear new albums from 30 plus year veterans **Misanthrope** (France) and **Atrocity** (Germany) and both bands have an illustrious career thanks to their ability to transverse genres and record creative music, the latter disappointed me with their one dimensional death metal on ***Okkult III***, but **Misanthrope** still show a flair for the unexpected on ***Les Declinistes***. **Holy**

Nachtlich: ***Third Ritual*** ***Third Ritual*** was originally released independently back in 2018, prior to **Nachtlich**'s two full lengths and a number of e.p.'s and compilations. There are six songs here and most of ***Third Ritual*** is highlighted by U.E.'s chaotic shrieking and traditional black metal sound. "Resolute" and "A Frozen Moor" are quiet, instrumental and atmospheric. The cold north of Canada surely provides inspiration for their sound. Another highlight is "Solitude of Coffin Intrusion" which is mid paced and delightfully noisy. **Inferna Profundus**

WICKED MARAYA

One of my favorite features in any magazine I've ever read was one which went into the studio to speak with a band that was recording a new album. I'm going to try to make this a monthly column and help hype upcoming albums as they are being created.

For our first feature we are focusing on a two part series with **Wicked Maraya**. The Long Island based metal band developed a loyal following in the early nineties when they changed their name from **Mystic** to **Wicked Maraya**. Their 1994 debut, ***Cycles***, was an instant hit with fans of power metal. Featuring intense, but catchy songs like "Johnny" and "Another Day," ***Cycles*** mixed progressive tendencies, with straight forward guitar riffs and the talented vocals of Lou Falco.

They recorded the second album, ***No Hope for Humanity***, with Jim Morris in Tampa. Another album higlighted by the instant classic "Life is Hungry," it was a worthy follow-up to the beloved ***Cycles***, but alternative music reigned supreme and **Wicked Maraya** got lost in the shift in popular music styles.

Their third release came out in 1996. ***Counterculture*** was a more modern sounding record with a more aggressive sounds on songs like "God Helps" and "Counterculture." Falco's vocals had a little more bite and less finesse compared to the sound **Wicked Maraya** fans loved with ***Cycles***, but ***Counterculture*** remains a highly overlooked album.

Nineteen years later they returned with ***Lifetime in Hell***- not a new album, but rather the record they originally recorded at Morrisound Studio back in 1991. The album featured two new songs, "Fall from Grace" and "Suicidal Dawn." These proved the band had still had the talent to capture the same energy and talent they had over twenty ago.

Which leads us to January 2023. Lou Falco flew up from Florida to bassist John Iadeviao's studio in Valley Stream (man, I miss ***Slipped Disc Records***) to do pre-production work on five new **Wicked Maraya** tracks. Falco comments, "the new songs sound like what we achieved with ***Cycles***," as he lays down tracks at Front Row Recording Studio. "The creativity

and music is just insane." "There are a lot of elements of the first record. A lot of atmospheric, moody, with time changes and big harmonies. John's coming up with some wild stuff." After a few days of hard work and a massively successful pre-production, Falco returned to Florida.

On a frigid weekend during the first week in February, the band convened at guitarist Dan Malsch's famed Soundmine Recording Studio in Pennsylvania. Most recent albums by metal giants **Gojira** (***Fortitude***) and **Ghost** (***Impera***), have been recorded by Dan here. We'll have a full interview with Lou and a more detailed update about the songs in the next issue... stay tuned.

Negative Vortex: ***Tomb Absolute*** **- Negative Vortex** first appeared on the death metal scene in 2015 with a demo and ***Tomb Absolute*** is their full length debut. The duo (Marcelo Rodrigues and Mario Martinelli) were both part of early nineties Brazilian death metal band the **Endoparasites**, so they're veteran musicians. They play a Scandanavian style of death metal and vary the pace, sometimes in the same song ("Tomb Absolute"). I like that they tend to add a little something special and different to each of their lengthy compositions. The pace changes and the added elements make the album a more interesting listen. **Sentient Ruin**

Niederwelt: Deus Magnus – Germany's **Niederwelt** return with their second album in as many years, the promising ***Deus Magnus***. **Niederwelt** is a full band and have only been around a couple of years now. The recording quality is on the low side, though it's not inappropriate for their style of black metal. I find vocalist Ghash is more interesting and unique than your typical black metal screechers. **MX Official**

Obituary: ***Dying of Everything*** - Florida death metallers **Obituary** are an institution. One of the originators of the famous Floridian death metal movement from the late eighties and early nineties (along with **Death**, **Deicide**, **Morbid Angel**, **Monstrosity**, etc.) They have always had their signature mid paced simple death metal riffing with John Tardy's recognizable vomitous vocalizations. "Be Warned," Dying of Everything's closing track best exemplifies that classic sound of **Obituary**. "Barely Alive" is that one fast paced song that differs from the usual mid paced stomp. "The Wrong Time" and "My Will to Live" are two standout tracks and best show the **Obituary** sound, the former and instant head nodder. "Dying of Everything" has some sharp guitar and drum work. Another slight change is that John Tardy's vocals are little more aggressive and less of the instantly recognizable sound he had in the early days. Relapse

Occulsed: ***Parturition of Adulteration*** **-** This is a remaster of Atlanta death metallers **Occulsed**'s first two e.p.'s; ***Cenotaph to Putridity*** and ***Ceremonial Lifelessness*** with a new song, the headbanging "Resiled Necromniscence." **Occulsed** play fast paced, old school death metal. Even with the remastering, this album sounds primitive and not the work of a veteran band. This is even more apparent with the new song, "Resiled Necromniscience," which shows more maturity in the songwriting department. **Everlasting Spew**

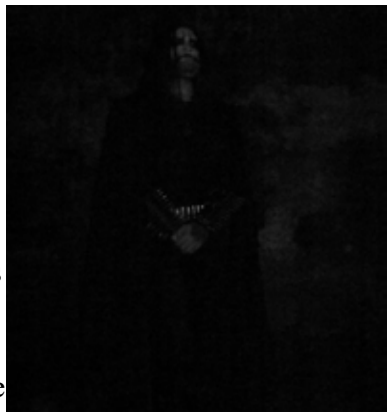
Onward: ***Of Epoch and Inferno*** **- Onward** is back with their first album since 2014 and first album without late vocalist Michael Grant. Joining mainstay guitarist Toby Knapp is new vocalist Robert Van War (ex-**Attika**). With a new line-up in tact, Toby has decided to take the musical direction further away from progressive power metal and into a more speed metal territory. An accomplished shredder for more than thirty years (he was on Mike Varney's Shrapnel roster), Toby proves to be an equally worthy riff master on ***Of Epoch and Inferno***. "Vicious Beauty" and "Ring Around the Rosary" have riffs that are so good, they can't be ignored. Toby's riffs and solos are the highlight of this **Onward** album, but my only complaint are that the vocals are buried in the mix. "Neptune's Revenge" is one song where the vocals stand out. **Moribund**

Owl: ***Awaken the Mountain*** **-** It's been a long time coming but California psychedelic doom/stoner rockers **Owl** are back with their third full length album. Looking at the logo, the artwork, and listening to this album, you would swear this was recorded in the mid-seventies. Everything about this band has that look and sound. **Owl** is a family affair, only outsider is new bassist Jamie Sanitate and his love for **Iron Maiden** fits in perfectly with **Owl**'s retro sound. First single "Minion of the Amethyst Cave" has an energetic vibe recalling a more laid back **Black Sabbath** or some of those N.W.O.B.H.M. bands from the late seventies and early eighties. Most of this album are full of four minute song oriented tracks, but there is "A King for Every Mountain" which is an adventurous ten minute song. Anyone who loves seventies sounding rock will enjoy **Owl**. **Flummox**

Patriarchs In Black: ***Reach for the Scars*** **- Patriarchs In Black** is the latest project from **Hades**/**Non-Fiction** maestro Dan Lorenzo (**Vessel Of Light**, **Cassius King**) and he is joined by drummer Johnny Kelly (**Type O Negative**, **Quiet Riot**, **Danzig**, among many others). Among the guest bassists are previous collaborators Sott Lepage and Jimmy Schulman and among the guest singers are Karl Agell (**Leadfoot**, ex-**Corrosion Of Conformity**) and John Kosco (**Dropbox**). As with any Dan Lorenzo project, you get kick ass guitar riffs and energetic, memorable songs that combine old school metal, doom, and rock into

Pyreficativm is the solo project of Chilean extreme metal musician and artist Lord Valtgryftake. The artist from Chile has a number of current projects (**13th Temple**, **Gryftigaen, Grymmstatt**, **Mantiel**, **Old Castles, Rundgard**, and **Winterstorm**, among them) and is creating his own old school black metal brigade. We sent over some questions to find out more about this mysterious talent.

How do you feel about the release of the new Pyreficativm album, *Oneiron*? It's certainly an album that already took a while to wait, it's to say, that it kept on stand by for different internal and personal factors. Later I decided to resume this work to complete my path in this piece called ***Oneiron***. The process during this recording and the art that represents this trip to the entrance of Ithaqua were interesting to explore.



You're a highly prolific musician and involved in several bands/projects- what do you feel distinguishes you as a musician? Yes, I am involved in different bands and projects with members of the circle and outside of it, I don't quite understand what you mean with your question since it is too ambiguous.

Why do you feel the esoteric black and white visuals work best for your style? More than a style, we take this with something much higher and solemn, many are probably thinking about the fact that fashion is to cut and paste, to look as photocopied as possible through a character and a criticism that is fashionable, however, for us this is not the case and it does not even have anything to do with the aesthetics/character of our operations and propaganda, art and work performance etc. This goes back to the beginnings of analog photography and those historical records that are involved in conjunction with our Valdivian history, this has nothing to do with the empty fashion of looking evil with photocopies. At some point in our begin nings they needed this and to perfect our propaganda aesthetics as a science and art of past times, to perfect the technique through both worlds, both analog and digital, since our intention with this is only to pay tribute to our history and cultivate the aesthetics of those times of photographic pioneers who achieved such visual advances with really interesting formats to study.

What new albums are you already recording and preparing for release this year? After having recorded ***Oneiron***, I have resumed two albums that I left on standby at the time of the beginning of the pandemic, works that were going to be released with other labels and due to the social outbreak plus the collateral effect left by this pandemic issue, these labels closed their activities and I also decided to abort the continuation of the composition processes of these albums. Even ***Onerion*** was part of these albums that were on standby. Now, I am resuming these activities little by little since here I need much more focus and disciplinary study with the competent arts to the band. So having said that, I am continuing the pending recordings from that time, the next album will be totally different and we could compare it to the level of Ast Zho El and Ærchaiontic Incantations, but in this work the initial idea goes back to the time of 2016 when Ast had finished. Zho El, had several sketches and half-finished recordings that constituted a next album, however he discarded the idea as he wanted something much more internalized in dissonant sounds and a much more complex empirical study towards the Drakonian current. Now, moving on to the present, I have decided to mix all those ideas from that time and the current one to create the next opus called "Sól' Anægphomœh" which will close the Ritual Ambient albums to continue only in the path of Occult Black Metal. with "K´aahz Menoh" the next album that was postponed in 2020. In summary I am working with these two albums for 2023.

Do you feel you have to focus on one project exclusively before working on the next or do you have a free flowing work ethic which allows you to work several projects (artistically and musically) at the same time? No, I don't have any limitations when it comes to working on my bands, the truth is that I can work on up to six things at the same time and each one with its different character. The methodology and the empirical aspect of each work is different and locked

very seriously from the beginning, this allows me to have a solid vision when composing, it is a fundamental pillar in my orchestration processes as well.

Do you have your artwork with Seelensdunklah Illustration available to the public to view? What theme do you feel is most important in your artistic side? I only have a private profile that corresponds to my visual work as Seelensdunkläh Illustrator and also my paintings page as Carlos Andrés Eckhardt. If we talk about dealing with a particular topic, I feel that artistic values should be cultivated and taken seriously, given the space that it really deserves in a world of plastic marketing. Today there is a lot of information and a lot of artists who are really very talented and yet are ruined by a wave of crap they call art, but are really just the scribbles of a small child. I admire good art and there should be an awareness regarding this and I even have my limitations regarding great pioneers and what they supposedly considered art... a good pollok only sells by name, not by a polished technique or a painting without words, in short, it is a very personal opinion that I have regarding art.

Mahamvantara Arts Records has an impressive catalogue of releases, and you have created a thriving scene of dark, extreme black metal music and imagery for a few years now, what do you hope to accomplish? That is true, the only purpose of us is to cultivate this art and execute it in all its possible directions, for the rest, we do not expect anything in return, only the real cultivation of the sinister art.

In the digital world we currently live in, I find it admirable that you have a passion for releasing music on cassette, why do you feel this is an excellent format for your music to be released? Good question, honestly, since I was a child I have felt a very deep attraction to this tape format, my parents are also great collectors of them and I think it was worrying to an inherited taste for them. This format makes you feel something indescribable, something very compact for its time and that does not stop providing the same feeling of joy and treasure, with this format you can do many things such as personalize them, manipulate the tape and endless other things related to DIY and recording. The possibilities that we offer are enormous, besides my obsession with collecting strange tapes continues to grow, that's why I decided to release them and use this format to represent all the artistic part that can be done with the tapes.

Any final comments? Just to say thanks for the interest and the space offered in this zine, wait for the new opus of **Pyreficativm** ***Sól' Anægphomæh*** for this 2023.

Reviews continued...

his own sound (**Kiss**, **Black Sabbath**, **Aerosmith**). "I'm the Dog" is an excellent opener, the simple and effective riff and Karl's vocals take you right back to the **Corrosion Of Conformity**'s ***Blind*** album and how essential that sound is. The most immediate song is "Sing for the Devil" with the vintage Lorenzo riff. "This Damn War" and the doomy "Demon of Regret" both feature Karl's distinctive vocals.Those familiar with Dan Lorenzo's three solo albums or the album he did with the Cursed (**Overkill**'s Blitz on vocals) will enjoy the nasty attitude of "Hate My Life." "Mourning This Life" and "The Submission Bell" are two great songs as well and even their cover of the **Led Zeppelin** classic "Kashmir" makes for a great listen. **Patriarchs In Black** isn't as immediate as **Cassius King**. You would be wise to spin this a few times and live with it for a week because there's some great songs here.

Pyreficativm: ***Oneiron*** - Another solo project from Lord Valtgryftake (aka Melek Rsh Nvth IX here). This is my favorite of his projects. **Pyreficativm** is their fifth album and it's quality old school black metal. If this came out in the early nineties, **Pyreficativm** would have been huge. **Pyreficativm** do combine some majestic ambient with their traditional black metal. Inferna Profundus

Pythian: ***Understanding in Light*** - **Pythian** is a trio from Ohio and ***Understanding in Light*** is their most recent and most accomplished e.p. There are four songs and half an hour of impressive, unclassifiable heavy music here. You can hear elements of the better of those "post-hardcore" bands like **Cult Of Luna** or **Isis** and some of those New England bands from the late nineties and early two thousands. There's some sludge and doom here and a vocalist with enough dynamics to his semi-aggressive style to keep your interest. I hear some serious potential in **Pythian** and look forward to more new music in the near future. **Morbid and Misrerable**

Sarkasm is a Canadian death trash band that's actually been around since 1990. They released a couple of demos and vocalist Bruno Bernier went on to front popular thrashers **Obliveon** appearing on 1995's ***Cybervoid*** and 1999's ***Carnivore Mothermout***h. **Sarkasm** performed a few live shows and had a compilation released in 2012, but now they are ready to take on the world with their official debut, ***As Empires Decay***, coming out this January on Xtreem Music.

It's been 23 years in the making, but finally we have your official full length debut- how does it feel? It's actually been more like thirty years since our last release! Our last one was ***Inner Flame*** in 1992. It feels awesome, I'd say. We've been talking on and off about getting back together to write some new stuff, and we finally made it happen in 2019. And really, it clicked right away- we had not lost the **Sarkasm** vibe, and our new songs were just like a continuation of our previous efforts. We had all gained in maturity and experience but still liked the same kind of music so it all fell back on track in no time.

What were those early 90's days like? Your brand of technical thrash should have been huge back then. It certainly was, with many great bands like **Malevolent Creation**, **Suffocation**, **Gorguts**, **Death** and many others. We were more on the thrash side than those bands but certainly shared some common influences. Death metal back then that was blooming and every week we would drive to Montreal to see our favorite bands play. And then it started to change slowly as the grunge wave was taking over the venues.

There's the connection with Obliveon with Pierre working on the demo with you and Bruno singing with them in the 90's, I was always disappointed there wasn't another album after *Carnivore Mothermouth*, but I think Obliveon fans will really dig what Sarkasm has to offer here. Do you think the connection helps Sarkasm? Well I would surely say the connection helped **Obliveon** the most haha. Bruno is a great singer and has a great stage presence, he is definitely a great asset for both bands. We are for sure very grateful for the help and support we got from Pierre, he is a great sound engineer and he knows and understands what we want and where we want to go aesthetically. We always appreciated the music of **Obliveon**, they are a bunch of highly skilled musicians and the originality of their songs makes them stand out of the crowd. Hopefully one day we see a follow-up to ***Carnivore Mothermouth***.

How was the response to the live shows you did a few years prior to the official reformation? Response was great. I think our music is still relevant, and catchy enough that even people who don't know our songs can understand it and enjoy our performances. Our new material will please a very large crowd as well. We can't wait to release the album.

The first thing I notice on As Empires Decay is that killer guitar tone. What type of equipment did you use to capture that sharp, yet warm sounding death thrash riffing? For one guitar we used an Engl Invader amp with an XXL Pro Engl cab. That cab is solid, especially in the mid and low ranges, for a lot of chug and clean rhythm tones. The other guitar was also using the Engl cab but with the legendary Peavey 5150 head. Both guitar setups used an overdrive pedal in front of the amp, for a strong and tight input signal into the preamp. We also used an attenuator between the amp and cab, to really heat up the tubes without saturating the speakers or mike.

Will you be performing any live shows in the new year? What other plans do you have to promote the album? Can't wait to meet our fans. We have one show planned for our official album release, and it will be followed by many other shows, which should all be announced shortly. Stay tuned.

People look back at bands like Dark Angel and Destruction with reverence, I listen to this album and I'm right there headbanging to these songs, I feel there's your band takes that fast paced vintage thrash sound into a modern era, where do you think Sarkasm fits in the metal pantheon? Well first, thanks for the nice comments, we really do appreciate it. As for where we fit, I don't think it's for us to decide. When it comes to writing music, we try to follow our instinct and write stuff that we like to listen to, something that will make us headbang. I think our roots are showing through our songwriting, but we try to keep our distinctive sound, riffing and pace. Hope-

fully many people will like it too, and our songs will play often eenough to be remembered for a long time.

Do you feel the album's title and lyrics refer to a present and future we are witnessing before our eyes? There are people afraid of covid, but I have more fear of what our governments are doing to society and we could be on the verge of a huge economic (and thus, societal) collapse. A collapse is happening at so many levels- economy, politics, religions, businesses, ethical values and principles, information, etc. It is difficult not to notice. People have never been so divided, so anxious, so depressed and at the same time so hungry to find a sense to their lives. Our songs are about our history, our present, our future, about some of the challenges and trials we are facing. Life's never been as easy as it is today, and yet happiness is elusive, it's as if we've lost our way. Governments are just a reflection of what happens in society. In all spheres of life, lie and deceit are now the new norm. We will need to rise above this if we want things to change. Our songs are nothing less than a call for change.

Any final comments?

Thank you for giving us a chance to spread our music around. Greetings to all your readers, from all of Sarkasm. We hope you'll take time to give our new album a spin, and hope you'll like our new music. Cheers to all and long live metal.

California extreme metallers **Slog** are back with their sophomore album, ***Divination***. The duo of Nick Turner (guitars, bass) and Jared Moran (vocals, drums) have created a sound that mixed elements of doom, sludge, black metal, and death metal for a diverse sound that recalls some of the early nineties experimental extreme metal artists. Here is Nick for more information.

The first thing that I noticed about this album is your guitar playing- the tone, some of those riffs are just sick and stand out, how would you explain your approach to playing on this album? So something interesting about **Slog** is that the drum parts are actually composed first and sent to me, so I am able to sit with these templates of usually entirely slow drums and painstakingly work out riffs that flow and tell a story for each song. I really wanted this album to be a step up from the debut so I spent a lot longer with each song writing a cohesive composition. And the cool thing is that writing to the drums I was really able to build up certain riffs, repeating it in different ways until it explodes into a faster and more energetic part. But really it was a mix between total funeral doom depressing riffs, nasty death metal riffs, old school atonal type death metal riffs, and some totally out there stuff added in like some avant black as well. Then the leads added at the end help to give it even more strange atmosphere. As far as the actual guitar I'm using is a fender telecaster from the 1970's tuned all the way down to Drop G.

Graves was a solid debut, especially for this genre, I feel *Divination* is even better, it sounds better, it's even more compelling- what was different this time around in terms of writing and studio work? As far as studio, I had some new amps to add to the arsenal. I recently had the amazing man at Science Amps build me the Science Mother 200 watt mark III, an absolute beast in red and black with 4 KT88 tubes that is basically like a Hiwatt with an added hi gain channel. That really helped create the thick and nasty tone on the record. For more 90's flair, I layered it all with an ampeg ss140c solid state head, an old classic. For bass I used an old kramer aluminum neck bass through my Sunn Concert Lead. For the writing, like I said it was that added time and effort put into each song making sure that it flowed perfectly from start to finish. Lots of hours put into both the writing and recording for this album.

You live in California right? I know the rain and floods are crazy right now and supposed to get worse this weekend, how is it by you? I actually love the rain, but the infrastructure here in Los Angeles is not built to withstand any consistent heavy rain. Lots of roads flooded and were closed down, potholes in the streets, people crashing into each other, etc. I actually had to work a brutal work shift through the worst of the rain and then when I got home my entire parking garage was flooded and I just had to wade through it.

Slog brings me back to the early 1990's when bands like this (Winter, Pan Thy Monium, Sorrow, hell even the first Paradise Lost) were creating this mood and sound- I feel like Slog takes that core sound and makes it even more interesting, not modern- since this is timeless music, but expands the death doom sound, where do you see Slog fitting in the pantheon of metal and who do you think would be your fans? I mean you are listing some of my favorite bands in existence in this list so the comparison is definitely valid. **Pan Thy Monium** literally blew my mind the first time I heard it, and the early **Paradise Lost** demos are gems that I return to time and time again. I love the era of metal when experimentation was fully allowed, recording was raw and albums were made by any means necessary. I feel like we take the same mindset and approach in our work and just add our own spin on it with our own life experience and musical experience added. Obviously with digital recording and DAW's and such we have the ability to add more guitar tracks, more leads, and have a little more effects and overall layers on it than with a 4 track or something. But that core influence is 1000000% right there. I might add a band called **Runemagick** as well which I absolutely love.

There's a genuine nature to these two Slog albums. What events in your life have found its way into what you've created here? I've been through a lot in my life, from losing my father at a young age to a decade long heroin addiction, to finally finding sobriety

and going through that process of change and painful facing of my past and self. All of that goes into Slog. That real life experience on top of real human emotions of despair, hopelessness, meaninglessness, and also trying to find and create meaning thereof. There's also a very strong occult/mystical theme in **Slog**'s work, another thing I have dabbled with throughout my life. But really at it's core it's about the pain of existence and having to **Slog** forth regardless. To me music says things beyond words that other art forms just cannot say, and that's why I love it so much.

You and Jared have so many other bands and I find it cool and fascinating that the styles of these other bands run the gamut of extreme metal; how do you find the time to create so much music? Do you find you have to be in a certain mood for a particular style/band or do you feel you have a wealth of creativity to use no matter which band's music you're working on at a particular time? I do feel I have a wealth of creativity and could write a song at any time. But to really do the best work for a particular album or project I have to immerse myself in the headspace necessary. So because we have so many projects there is no reason to force or rush anything, as we can just work on what headspace we are currently in in the moment. And music should always be a reflection of a certain headspace, a snapshot in time of where the members are at, perhaps reaching towards a deeper communal mind of others who are feeling the same way. As far as finding time, I work an extremely demanding job from 4pm-12am and on call 24/7, but it helps me to continue to fund my music. So I wake up and work on music all day until I have to leave for work, every day. No excuses.

Looking back at this extensive discography, is there a particular album or song you really feel represents you the best or do you really need to listen to the cumulative work to understand what Nick Turner is as a musician and songwriter? I would say my **Nothing Is Real** work probably sums up who I am as a musician the best, as that is stuff where I'm not trying to sound like anything or anyone else and just doing what I am inspired by in the moment. ***Give Me Your Energy*** was the first true album I released (I had released random stuff and half baked demos in the past but never a start to finish concept album) and I was amazed that it got any response at all and it inspired me to continue to follow my vision and do whatever the hell I want. I was going back through my **Nothing Is Real** catalog last night and it was amazing to hear the mindsets I was in and the progression of playing and writing. But there's something special about those early records, and something I definitely want to try to capture again, the complete open tapestry devoid of any outside inspiration.

It's too early in your career to talk about legacy, so let's go with what you hope to accomplish as a musician- what are your ultimate goals and what do you feel you can offer to an extreme metal fan (any genre) that would appeal to a potential fan or listener? I am just going to keep doing what I am doing, and hopefully with that more and more extreme metal fans can hear it and be affected in some way and enrich lives in any way possible. I'm not planning on slowing down any time soon and wherever that takes me is just fine. Playing live is fun, but my true passion is in recording, composing, and creating songs from the ground up and releasing records that will last forever. I feel what I offer to extreme metal fans is a music that has a different sound, that both hearkens back to the old and draws upon genuine life experience, and is open to experiment and do whatever the hell it wants, because that's what true music or art should always do.

Any final thoughts or comments? I just want to say I truly appreciate you enjoying this album so much, and there is much more to come this year. Thank you for this great interview.

Riverside: ***Identity*** - Polish progressive metallers **Riverside** return for their first album since 2018's Wasteland. ***Identity*** is a modern conceptual album and it is probably **Riverside**'s most diverse album to date. The production is first class and you can clearly hear everything that is going on musically. Sometimes I'm reminded of the progressive rock of **Genesis**, especially when there are keyboards up front, like on "I'm Done With You." "Self Aware" gives off a rock vibe, while "The Place Where I Belong" is a lengthy prog rock/metal epic which shows off the many facets to **Riverside**'s sound. ***Identity*** is a solid progressive album, but I don't feel there are any essential songs.

Ronnie Romero: ***Raised on Metal Radio*** **-** Ronnie Romero is best known for his work singing for the **Ferrymen**, **Rainbow**, **Sunstorm**, **Lords Of Black**, and **Michael Schenker Group**. If you know any of those bands you will have an idea of what type of singer he is. He does possess a voice that has a little of that Ronnie James Dio grit and power, along with the finesse you would expect from such an in demand melodic singer. This is an album of covers by metal legends with typical popular songs from **Accept**, **Ozzy Osbourne**, **Judas Priest**, **Metallica**, **Manowar**, **Iron Maiden**, **Rainbow**, and **Yngwie Malmsteen**. I was pleased to hear two of my favorite, but not most popular songs covered from Black Sabbath ("The Shining") and **Deep Purple** ("The Battle Rages On"). Chris Caffery (**Savatage**, **Spirits Of Fire**) guests on the former. Ronnie is talented and he has stepped up with **Rainbow** and **Sunstorm** recently and his work with Magnus Karlsson and the **Ferrymen** must be commended. This is a follow-up to his previous ***Raised on Radio*** covers album, but moves on from A.O.R. and classic rock to heavy metal covers here. **Frontiers**

Rundgard: ***Ulvmonddomanen*** **-** Here's another release from the busy musician and artist from Chile. **Rundgard** previously released ***Stronghold of Majestic Ruins*** in 2021 and ***Ulvmonddomanen*** is the logical follow-up. I really like the atmosphere and mood Valtgryftake creates on ***Ulvmonddomanen***. "Dominions of Unveiled Grim Obedience" is dark and moody, I enjoy the hypnotic and repetitive nature, while "Unhallowed Visions of Monumental Black Arts" is just solid mid to fast paced old school black metal. **Inferna Profundus**

Sarkasm: ***As Empires Decay*** **-** This album takes me back to 1991 when **Heathen** released ***Victims of Deceptio***n and **Dark Angel** released ***Time Does Not Heal***, **Believer**'s ***Sanity Obscure*** came out the year before as well… or maybe **Obliveo**n's classic ***Cybervoi***d- after all **Sarkas**m vocalist Bruno Bernier sang on **Obliveon**'s last two albums. I know **Sarkasm** has a little more death metal to them, but the sharp thrashing guitars, the fast paced rhythm section and those vocals will find more appeal from the old school thrash metal crowd than your typical death metal fan. This band was releasing demos back in 1990-1992, and underground interest resulted in some live shows and a compilation release in the 2000's. ***As Empires Decay*** is much more sophisticated than your typical debut album. This is a band that has stuck together through decades and deliver a timeless fast paced thrashing classic. **Xtreem**

Sicut Glacies: ***Eremitt Vokter Ab Tid*** - **Sicut Glacies** is a duo from Italy and Norway- one member handles the vocals, the other the music. This second full length is epic black metal. In between, ***Eremitt Vokter Ab Tid*** starts and finishes with cinematic foreboding instrumentals. This isn't a stand out, but it's not bad either. **Sicut Glacies** will draw black metal fans for sure, but there are more accomplished bands that would better draw fans of other metal genres. **MX Official**

Slegest: ***Avstand Avstand*** is Slegest fourth singularly titled album of black metal mixed with rock and roll/metal. ***Avstand*** is like rock and roll musically, but with the troll like vocal style of Stig Ese. When **Slegest** pick up the pace like they do on "Vinterkrisus" they sound more like an old school black metal band, but they are more similar to fellow countrymen **Vreid** and **Sarke** in the way that they play mid-paced black metal, but sounding more rock with the extreme vocals. They close with a cover of the **Status Quo** hit "Oh Baby." **Dark Essence**

Slog : ***Divination*** **- Slog** is a doom metal duo from California. ***Divination*** is the follow-up to 2021's Graves. **Slog** plays typical old school death doom metal, the deep growly one dimensional vocals, with dark, depressing music, slow paced, but I really do like some of these guitar riffs. They have a little more edge to them than your typical band of this genre. **Morbid And Miserable**

Sons Of Cult: ***Back to the Beginning*** **-** ***Back to the Beginning*** is an apt title for this Spanish heavy metal band. The music here recalls the late seventies and early eighties New Wave of British Heavy Metal movement mixed with some of the doom rocking metal of bands like **Pentagram** and **Witchfinder General**. The songs are deliberately paced and with competent, but nothing remarkable, vocalization from Jaume Vilanova. This is the second album to come out in the beginning of January to feaure guitarist Vicente Paya and the other (**Bisonte**'s ***Broken***) is much more recommended. **Fighter**

Storms Within: ***Minds of the Wicked*** **-** I believe ***Minds of the Wicked*** is the debut album of Pennsylvania's **Storms Within**, although they've been around for nine years and have several local shows. This is solid straight ahead melodic metal/ energetic rock, led by frontwoman Erica Mayr. The songs are short and direct. There is an anger and aggression to the lyrics that is matched by the energy of the musicians. Despite the lyrical aggression, the band fits in a more melodic category of metal. "Eternalize" is the strongest song here, even if "Rage" is more representative of the sound **Storms Within** have captured here.

Ten: ***Something Wicked This Way Comes*** **-** It's hard to believe British melodic rockers **Ten** have been around for almost three decades (minus a four year hiatus) and this is their sixteenth album. Recorded around the same time as last years ***Here Be Monsters***, ***Something Wicked This Way Comes*** delivers exactly what you would expect from Gary Hughes and **Ten**. Catchy melodic/progressive rock with Gary's distinctive mid level tone and professional musicianship with an occasional standout guitar riff. **Ten** have never been one of my favorite bands, but I've always appreciated their skill and Gary Hughes' songwriting and singing ability. They've had almost a dozen amazing songs in their career. My favorite here is "Parabellum" which is one of their few songs that sounds heavier than the others. ***Something Wicked This Way Comes*** is not their best, but if you know Gary Hughes and his style, this is just right. **Frontiers**

Tithe: Inverse Rapture – ***Inverse Rapture*** is Portland's **Tithe**'s follow up to their 2020 debut ***Penance***. The best parts of this album are when the pace slows down and Matt Eisman gets to shine on some creative guitar playing. It's a mix of sludge, black, and a little punk and death metal. I do think Matt's vocals are very good for this extreme style of screaming. Most of the album is blasting away, but there are enough slower, sludgier passages to keep you listening; but this album is savage. **Profound Lore**

Tot Aus Dem Wald: ***Satan No Mono*** - German black metaller Das Kakophoniea created **Tot Aus Dem Wald** back in 1997 but has been busy putting out three full lengths in the last three years. **Tot Aus Dem Wald** is all about fast paced old school black metal. The eight songs here are one dimensional and will appeal to traditional black metal fans. The more modern melodic/atmospheric style and shoegaze elements are nowhere to be found on ***Satan No Mono***. **MX Official**

Totensucht: ***Trimurti*** Germany's Keltor's solo project **Totensucht** is back for his fifth full length album. Keltor briefly moved to England and released an album with **Scutum Crux**. He's been focused on **Totensucht** and ***Trimurti***'s style of old school black metal. The faster paced black metal comes across as messy and underproduced- something that underground black metal values, but does not make for an enjoyable listen. When **Totensucht** slows down on "Embraced by Fire" the album becomes a much more enjoyable listen. **Wolfmond**

Toxicon - ***Be the Fire and Wish for the Wind*** This Australian band is an unexpected gem. ***Be the Fire and Wish for the Wind*** is the follow up to their 2016 debut, ***Purge***. **Toxicon** play power metal, borderline thrash, that will bring to mind the best from the American bands of this genre; **Metal Church**, **Vicious Rumors**, **Wicked Maraya**, etc. "Fear Itself" is heavy and almost thrash in its pacing. "Deletist" and the songs heavy groove recalls the **Metallica** self titled album. "The Lost" and "Synthetic" have an intensity that elevates this band to an elite level. Speaking of which, the two best songs are "Husk" and closer "Wish for the Wind." Both are over six minutes and take their time building up before unleashing some powerful riffs and solid vocals. This is a band worthy of your attention and a must for people who enjoy American power metal.

Vanja Gvozdanovic is a Croatian musician who I've been a fan of for several years now. He's a creative solo artist and his project **Vanja Gvozdanovic Depressor** has released several independent albums through the past fifteen years. Most of his albums are in the symphonic black metal style, but he's proven to be an open minded, creative musician who is unafraid to take risks and play from the heart. Here's a chat with Vanja to find out more about his music.

Let's start with the new album, The Final Plague. Is this the conclusion of the Battlestar Lemon albums? What was the inspiration for this concept? Yeah, ***Final Plague*** is the final ***Battlestar Lemon*** album. The story behind these albums goes like this: my wife and I were watching t.v. one night and ***Ben Hur*** came on, the one from 1959. As we were watching it, I was like "damn, the music is so great, with all the epic brass and whatnot." Really got me pumped up. That gave me inspiration to start recording some new tracks. Then I recorded the first track, one that would end up as a title track for the first ***Battlestar Lemon*** album, I couldn't think of a name for the track. I always have trouble with naming the tracks because in ninety nine percent of cases when I make music I never have a vision of what it's supposed to be, I just grab the guitar and start playing and recording. I'm sitting for like half an hour in front of the computer trying to think of something and then I remembered that my wife's nickname on Twitch was ***Battlestar Lemon***. I was like "Yeah! I could make a concept album about a huge biomechanical Lemon that came from space to destroy the Earth." From then on the album just kind of wrote itself, I think I recorded everything in two days.

The lyrics and storyline for *Battlestar Lemon II* led me to believe that was the end to the story, so it was a nice surprise to see this album coming out on New Year's Day. For the second album, it was pretty straightforward. This time I had a vision: I'm going to make the second ***Battlestar Lemon*** album, and it's going to be fast, brutal black metal. I woke up the next day in the morning, grabbed the guitar, pen and paper and by the evening the album was done. Needless to say the burnout was so severe I could barely function for the next few days. Then comes the third one. I got to say I'm very satisfied with this one. It really put my guitar playing to the test. Musically it's a combination of the first two, it has the symphonic elements of the first one combined with the brutal black metal from the second. To me it was a perfect way to end a trilogy. It was also recorded in a very short time, three days, I think. It was finished on 30th of December and then I just waited for the New Year to release it.

I think I see that you're also a middle school music teacher, do your students know about your music? How is the educational system in Croatia? Yes, I am a music teacher in elementary school. Croatian definition of elementary school is a bit different, so to keep it simple and not go into much detail, I teach students ages nine to fourteen. The students know about my music, they are actually very supportive. About the educational system in Croatia, I really can't say much. It has its ups and downs but it's good for the most part.

You've proven to be highly prolific, yet deliver high quality albums and a diverse approach to your style of extreme metal- what works for you when it comes to writing and recording these albums? Conversely, what's the most difficult aspect of being a one-man band? I'll try to explain the best I can. When I make music, I don't think too much about it, it just flows out of me. I don't poke around too much with the recordings, so what you hear are mostly first drafts and takes. Whenever I start rearranging stuff and poking around too much, to me the track is not good and I forget about it. In my opinion, if you have an original idea and then start to mess with it too much, then it isn't an original idea anymore. I also don't bother with the music theory stuff at all, because I think music comes from the heart, not from the brain. Sure, it doesn't hurt to know that stuff, but relying on it too much and approaching music that way kind of boxes you in. The only negative side of my way of doing things is that I also don't bother with production, so some tracks do have mistakes and audio clipping and whatnot. But that's the way I do it and have been doing it since the beginning. Sometimes I will hear some idea for a melody or a riff inside my head and then I either write it down on a piece of paper or record it immediately. The most difficult aspect of being a one-man band? Well, I don't find it difficult, if anything it's easier than being in a full band. The only difficulty I have is when it comes to lyrics, I am terrible at writing lyrics.

With so much music from every style of metal imaginable available one or two clicks away, how do you try to distinguish your product from the massive abundance of black metal out there? I say this too, because there are literally hundreds of mediocre (at best) projects out there for every one that is high quality and worth the extensive listening experience like what you have to offer. I wouldn't know, I don't bother with it that much. I make music mainly for myself, it is my way of venting out so to speak, and above all I enjoy it.

For any potential new fans out there reading this, is there one particular album that you feel someone should check out first? Do you feel your latest album is your best- or is there also another album you feel best captures what Vanja Gvozdanovic Depressor is all about? Oh this is a tough one. I guess if someone wants an introduction to my work, they should check out "Chernobyl," an instrumental track from 2009. It's hard to say what album captures my music the best, since my music ranges from eight bit, orchestral to all sorts of metal genres. I guess the latest album captures the phase I'm in at the moment. Next album is already recorded, I will release it sometime soon. It's also a black metal album but without so much chaos. Kind of in the vein of old **Darkthrone**. After that, I don't know, maybe a nu metal album, or some long instrumental track- time will tell. My personal favorite is probably the ***Nenad 2000*** album, especially the track " Ups and Downs."

I also enjoy your sense of humor that is injected on many of your albums? Why do you feel this is an important aspect to your vision for this project? For example: the ***Nenad 2000*** album was made when I was in a really low spot in life, but you could never tell that if you look at the cover and the track titles. But the music on that album is deeply sincere and emotional. I poured my heart and soul into that one, so to speak.

Any final comments? Thank you so much for having me for this interview. It's my first one. As I said before, a new album called ***This is Where We Die*** is done and will be released sometime soon. Thanks again, all the best. Cheers!

Reviews continued...

Turbid North: ***The Decline*** It's been eight long years since their last album, but Texas trio **Turbid North** are back with their best album yet. I've always heard the potential in Turbid North, but this album certainly fulfills that and exceed expectations. The first seven songs are short and direct. "Eternal Dying" starts off the album with a brooding brutality and some noisy, but ominous guitar playing. Next track, "The Oppressor" is also brutal and slower. **Turbid North** turn on the speed with the grinding "Slaves." In three short songs we get to hear how well rounded an extreme band this is. "Patients" is another short grind track. "Drown in Agony" is a perfect combination of the slow and fast styles of the band. "The Road" even has a guitar solo with a more traditional structure and some heavy ass bass sound. The last three tracks are longer, but no less interesting. This is what extreme metal should sound like.

Ulthar: ***Helionomicon/Anthronomicon*** – American black death metallers **Ulthar** follow up their sophomore record ***Providence*** with two albums. ***Helionomicon*** consists of two twenty minute tracks. While the vocals are generic death growls, the music is quite interesting- especially the labyrinthine guitar riffing. Both albums have spectacular artwork. ***Anthronomicon*** features eight songs, not that different from the epics on ***Helionomicon*** sound wise, although there seems to be more urgency because the length of about four of these tracks are about the same as the ***Helionomicon*** release. **20 BUCK SPIN.**

Vanja Gvozdanovic Depressor: ***The Final Plague*** **-** Damn, the last time I checked out a new album by **Vanja Gvozdanovic Depressor** it was ***Nenad 2000*** in 2021. He's already released half a dozen more albums since then, including the third part of the ***Battlestar Lemon*** trilogy, ***The Final Plague***. Despite the wealth of material, and my inability to keep up with it all, I always find Vanja's albums to be interesting. His style of black metal feels epic (even though most songs are about three minutes long) and eccentric. He reminds me of some of those nineties black metal bands when they started to become more melodic musically and visually, like **Night Conquers Day**, for instance.

Waxen

Toby Knapp has been one of the hardest working musicians for over three decades now I first encountered him when Steve Schwartz from ***Steve's Music Center*** shared his 1993 solo debut, ***Guitar Distortion*** (along with Darren Householder and Tony Fredianelli). Prior to that he released a trio of albums with his speed metal project, **Evil Incarnate**. He's well known for the power metal (now speed metal) band **Onward**. In 1998 he released the **Darken** e.p., which was the first time we heard a black metal sound from Toby. **Waxen,** started in 2004 and they are preparing their sixth album for release later this spring. Here is Toby to speak about **Waxen**'s new album.

Excited that there's a new Waxen coming. How do you feel about it? After the last **Waxen** album, 2019's ***Blasphemer in Celestial Courts***, I decided I was done working in the black metal genre. I didn't like what people were doing with it; movies, popular culture, black metal side projects of rock stars, post black metal- hipsters taking to **Burzum**. I never quit listening though. I just suddenly had all this music coming to me and it was dark. I call it non cathartic black metal because I don't think black metal is a social celebration. It's EVIL. The new **Waxen** album is totally fucked.

How does it sound compared to the previous albums? It's very raw and hateful yet musically progressive. It's such a strange mixture happening. It's like you're listening to a **Burzum** album and suddenly Ritchie Blackmore shows up to play a guest solo. It has the adrenaline of **Slayer**'s "Reign in Blood". It works you over for thirty minutes and does not let up. I think it's the best **Waxen** album since ***Fumaroth***.

How did Ahrin come to join you on this recording? What do you feel he adds to the Waxen sound? Ahrin is a good friend of mine and I've been a guest on some of his works. We have the same taste in music and there's a lot of camaraderie there. He sent me some drum tracks a few years ago of him just blasting away like Hellhammer. It took some time, but I was finally able to place some good riffs to his drum tracks. He doesn't play on the whole album, I mixed it up so he weaves in and out of the songs. He starts the record and he finishes it. It makes the album- everytime the listener might tire of the drum machine, he comes bashing in.

You've been working with Moribund Records for a few years now, what's it like working with someone like Odin who is also so passionate about metal? Yes, since 2010 and this Waxen album will be my tenth release on Moribund. I'm very proud and he gives me total musical freedom. If it weren't for Odin and Moribund's steadfast backing of my work, I would have put the guitar away years ago. We believe in what we are doing. We're old men fighting for metal.

I also really enjoyed the new Onward album, I think the speed metal sound gives a new edge to the band, it must've been weird not having Michael Grant singing though. It was, but when I heard Robert Van War's vocals, I thought it would be cool to have **Onward** mk 2- a speed metal band but not quite thrash metal. A hint of melody and tons of guitar. With **Onward**'s ***Reawaken*** the guitar was taking a back seat. I gave Michael total freedom on that album and I feel there are too many vocals. It's a feast for his fans I'm sure, but with the new **Onward** sound, I'm trying to shed the connection and comparisons with other bands people lump us in with. This has caused our fanbase to change and I'm fine with that. I don't like post 80's power metal or prog power metal. I like heavy metal.

I know you worked with Dean Sternberg on Where Evil Flows, I've been a fan of his vocals and playing since he sent me the Within Another demo over twenty years ago- are you still in touch? Dean's a massive talent and I'm happy with our collaborations. We don't speak anymore unfortunately. I hope he's happy and well. He's always got a project going on because he's so versatile and a multi instrumentalist with an excellent voice.

I admire your passion for all types of metal, besides your solo stuff, Onward, and Waxen- any other recordings planned for this year? I was working on a solo album and got really bored because I was writing stuff I could barely play and I just dreaded going into the recording room and tracking. I put the solo album away and started work on this forthcoming **Waxen** album. I'll get back to the solo album and we'll do another **Onward** album this year. I work non stop. I think I'll just remain in the **Onward**, solo and **Waxen** cycle.

Do you find it easier to come up with cool riffs or the shredding, but memorable solos? Creating good riffs and good solos can be difficult. Sometimes my riffs are locked in but my soloing sucks and vice versa. I still have a ways to go. I'm nothing near the guitarist I want to be. There are small traces of the sound I'm looking for on the **Onward** album and new **Waxen**. I still have to practice constantly, it's so easy to get lazy and lose skill. I'm really trying to avoid that.

Why does it seem society is going backwards and not learning the lessons from past mistakes? I think people are seeing how controlled we are, how our freedoms are being stripped, up is down, right is wrong. This is a bad time. The whole world has turned upside down. I don't have a place in it, I just have to navigate through it until my end. I've been telling people nuclear war is on the horizon and all my predictions on the how have fallen into place. N.A.T.O. is going to get us all killed. Hopefully I'm wrong. I dwell on it a lot.

Who are some other musicians you would love to play with on future endeavors? Well, I almost joined Mayhem in 2009 and still have contact with them a bit. It would be great if that finally came to pass. I doubt it though. I actually got to work with one of my biggest influences, Mathias Kamijo. I played three or four guitar solos on his Dead Earth project. Those Algaion albums he did had a big impact on me decades ago that still resonates.

Any final comments? Thanks so much for the support and interview. Look out for Waxen's Die Macht Von Hassen on Moribund Records in the coming months.

Progressive metallers **Zero Hour** are back after being away for fourteen years. Guitarist Jasun Tipton is back with a new bassist and drummer joining him and vocalist Erik and they have a new album, ***Agenda 21***, out now. Jasun is one of the most talented guitarists in the business and one of the nicest guys in the industry I've ever met. **Zero Hour** was featured on the cover for my last issue in 2006, so it only makes sense for them to return with me on issue 31.

Why was the time right for a new Zero Hour album? Jasun: It all started when I attended one of Roel's performances and he mentioning if I ever needed drums in the future, he's into it. That sparked everything for me. My brother would mention why not get **Zero Hour** back together so I knew I had his blessing. Soon after I saw a post from Erik playfully asking if anyone was looking for a singer with the song "Reflections" attached. All the signs were actively in front of me. Roel mentioning to bring Andreas in the fold. I couldn't look the other way any longer as this was our moment to come back.
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I loved the Chris Salinas albums and think the Fred Marshall album was extremely underappreciated- but Zero Hour feels more natural with Erik back in- what element do you feel is Erik's strength when it comes to Zero Hour? Jasun: The material we create together just has the right ingredients man. Erik is a storyteller and the landscape of music I feel brings out the best in Erik. He just knows how to get into character with material.

One thing about your music is that it is timeless, I love the way you combine intricacy with crushing heaviness and sharp riffing when it comes to your playing- how do you define your style of a guitarist and what? Jasun: For **Zero Hour** Troy and I wanted to create heavy, dark, intricate, dynamic music. A landscape and somewhat film score feel to the material. I'm definitely a progressive metal guitar player because I like incorporating many styles into the aggressive sound. Nothing is off limits.

What are your weapons (guitar and amp set up) of choice? How has recording changed for you between now and when you started Zero Hour over twenty years ago? Jasun: It's changed a little over the years. I started with a USA custom 6 string Ibanez into a Mesa Boogie dual rectifier. What's crazy is I just got that guitar back after many years. I'm tempted to using that guitar live. The next step was my Manne custom 7 string models that speak LARGE. My current weapon of choice is my Gibson Les Paul 57R Gold Top. Depending on the day I play it through my Mesa Mark 25, Engl Invader or Fractal AX8.

You have an all star rhythm section on the new album; did it feel strange recording a Zero Hour album without Troy and Mike? Jasun: With the long layoff the transition was easy. Troy and Mikey were huge for **Zero Hour**. They had the heartbeat pulsing strong with the past material. Roel and Andreas brought their amazing talents and musicianship to the **Zero Hour** sound. Much needed life for ***Agenda 21***.

Seeing the album title Agenda 21 was pleasing because there are so many citizens in America who really have no idea of what's going on around them and the way governments are controlling people, even more important, what type of future lies ahead for society- do you think the World Economic Forum and the Bill Gates Foundation are looking out for humanity's best interests, or is this another way for them to accumulate even more wealth and control? "The digital drug is the lobotomy" is a profound and truthful lyric- all the convenience we have thanks to the digital world makes life easier, but you can see the "enslavement"

whether it's adults who only follow one news source ideology or the kids who are addicted to various social media- do you think having access to all this information leads to a society that is less intelligent and less likely to do proper research? We've definitely seen a near extinction of proper investigative reporting. Erik: I really do not think anyone at the higher levels of control want to do good for humanity at large. Afterall, these people are not Mother Teresa types. They got to where they are by being ruthless and shrewd. It has been commonly said that after you have enough money to last you many lifetimes the only thing next to conquer is to be in control. All anyone has to do is watch any Klaus Schwab videos, Bill Gates doing a talk on TED about population control and vaccines etc. The evidence is out there. As George Carlin said, "It's a big club and you ain't in it". I personally do not trust the system will ever change. I don't care what country you are in but the same old structure remains: Royalty over the peasants. It just has a different look. Human nature never changes. It's a double-edged sword. On one side, it is too easy to just get updates automatically from whatever source of your choosing and get locked into whatever specific interests you. You may have and never look outside of those interests because it verifies your position on certain things. On the other hand, you have the world's library at your fingertips and are allowed to access anything if you are curious enough. So, it is just another tool to use depending on your will. Although, it can become a distraction on either side where there is information overload. I think it is a good idea to unplug at times.

How does being a new father change your perspective on life? Jasun: My little girl is my world! Her smile makes everyday the very best. My wife and my girls are my heart. I can't imagine life without them.

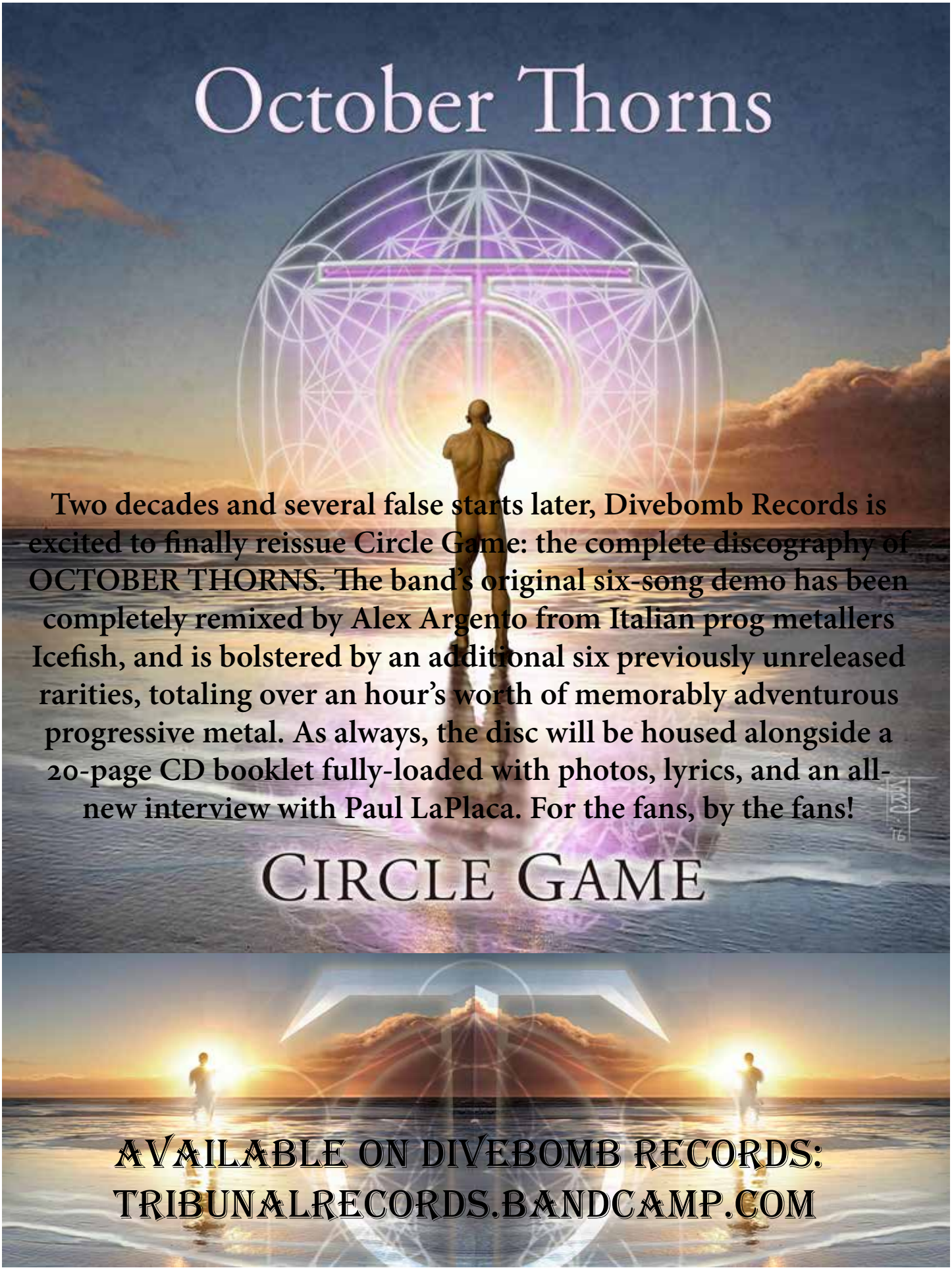
It's been a long time since I've seen you play live out here on the East Coast, any chance of live shows coming up this new year? Jasun: We're going to play Progpower USA which is very exciting. We've been trying to put together a couple other shows that I really want to see come together. Scheduling is difficult in regards to getting all the members in one place.

I really hope we don't have to wait eight years for Agenda 30 lol- it's been a long 14 years since your last album, but it's worth the wait- where do you see Zero Hour in the next year or so? Will you be recording any Abnormal Thought Patterns or A Dying Planet material in the near future? Jasun: The drums and guitars are already recorded for the next release. Andreas is hitting the bass out as we speak. Erik is coming up with ideas and it's sounding special. **A Dying Planet** will be recording another release and drums are being laid down. Unfortunately **Abnormal Thought Patterns** is no longer.

Final comments? Jasun: Thank you bro for the great interview. You've been spreading the word about the band since the beginning. It's great to be back.

Reviews continued...

Wothrosch: ***Odium*** This debut is killer. **Wothrosch** are a new band from Greece. This is their first release and it's an accomplished adventure. They play a combination of death metal that often ventures into the depths of dirty, brutal sludge metal. Think of **Gojira**, but much nastier and more brutal, same with old **Mastodon**, as these songs have that epic and brutal vibe they created on their first album or two. There are some faster, straight ahead death metal parts throughout ***Odium***, but when it comes to slow, intricate brutality; which is the majority of this album, **Wothrosch** really clicks and makes you feel the depth of this musical quagmire. Highly recommended. **Hammerheart**


October Thorns
Two decades and several false starts later, Divebomb Records is excited to finally reissue Circle Game: the complete discography of OCTOBER THORNS. The band's original six-song demo has been completely remixed by Alex Argento from Italian prog metallers Icefish, and is bolstered by an additional six previously unreleased rarities, totaling over an hour's worth of memorably adventurous progressive metal. As always, the disc will be housed alongside a 20-page CD booklet fully-loaded with photos, lyrics, and an all-new interview with Paul LaPlaca. For the fans, by the fans!
CIRCLE GAME
AVAILABLE ON DIVEBOMB RECORDS:
TRIBUNALRECORDS.BANDCAMP.COM