Features a plethora of metal styles and interviews with And Oceans, Bizarrekult, Enigma Division, Girish and the Chronicles, Great Cold Emptiness, Misanthrope, Necropanther, Owl, Rezn, Rigor Sardonicus, Toxicon, Uranium, Vision Eternel, Wothersch, Wounds Of Recollection, Paragon Records feature, in the studio with Wicked Maraya, and part two of Last Crack’s Burning Time analysis.
TABLE OF CONTENTS:
And Oceans... 4
Bizarrekult... 6,7
Black Magnet... 8,9
Enigma Division... 10,11
Girish and the Chronicles... 12,13
Great Cold Emptiness... 14-17
Last Crack... 19-23
Misanthrope... 24-26
Necropanther... 27-30
Reviews... 31-41
Owl... 42,43
Paragon Records... 44-46
Rezn... 48,49
Rigor Sardonicous... 50
Toxicom... 52, 53
Uranium... 54
Vision Eternel... 55-65
Wicked Maraya... 66, 67
Wothrosch... 68
Wounds Of Recollection... 70,71

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Thank you to all the bands, publicists, and record labels who make this all possible. Check out the Edge of Time magazine in Lithuania for an exciting interview with me. I found the album analysis to be the most complimented part of the last issue and this will continue. I already completed a long chat with Kory Clarke about Warrior Soul’s great debut, Last Decade Dead Century, and we have a whole bunch of other artists lined up. I would love to turn that into a book in the coming months. I have some improvements coming to the site, but my focus will always be on delivering these digital issues on the first day of each month. Send a message to say hello or offer any suggestions.
All 30 issues of Transcending the Mundane.
1999-2006
Finland symphonic melodic black metallers **And Oceans** have always created their own path. During their first go round, they progressively became more weird and industrial in sound. When they returned with **Cosmic World Mother** after an eighteen year absence, **And Oceans** returned to their original sound. **As in Gardens So in Tombs** is the logical follow-up and we spoke with guitarist Teemu Saari and vocalist Mathias Lillmans for an update.

How do you feel about the new album and how it fits into the And Oceans discography? Timo: I can speak for the whole band when I say that obviously we are very pleased with this new album of ours. I think it fits really well in our discography. It is the next level from **Cosmic World Mother**. A bit more balanced, well matured version. It seems that we have found our own sound now. Yes, it might lean on to the nineties, but still with a modern touch.

What was the lyrical inspiration for **As in Gardens, So in Tombs**? Mathias: I think that this album can be considered a continuation of what I started on **Cosmic World Mother**. This one just has a different perspective. As stated by laws of physics, energy is eternal. On **As in Gardens As in Tombs** I expand on this subject but through different lenses, so to speak, may it be different religions, world views or customs.

These last two albums see a return to your more extreme, yet melodic black metal sound, what led you to go back to that more extreme musical style? Timo: For me this feels more like home. I’m not afraid of experimenting with those more industrial sounds and electronic sounds, but maybe they are used more like a flavor not like a main course. This kind of sound and style hasn’t been that common recently at least what I’ve seen and heard so even more so there is room for this kind of sonic assault for sure.

I liked the futuristic sound of **AMGOD**, and the Havoc Unit album- was the name change more about the stylistic change of the band or were there other reasons for the existence of Havoc Unit? Timo: Yes, changing to **Havoc Unit** was because the sound and style changed so much so we thought it is better to start a new band for that. Also not all members continued with **Havoc Unit** so it was a no brainer to change the name.

How did it feel getting a proper full length Fester day album out in 2019? Timo: Damn, debut album after about thirty years since the birth of that band, it felt great. Still proud of that album. In fact we are preparing the next album. Starting demoing a few songs in the studio. We have eleven or twelve more or less ready songs for the album. So please check our pages for news of this.

Do you think the new album will get more attention because of the ability to travel and play live now? Timo: Yes, timing was bad for **Cosmic World Mother**. Though we didn’t want to postpone it since promotion had already started and we thought this covid would pass sooner. Yes, of course we are more confident now being able to promote this new album as it should, though after covid all expenses have risen like hell. That was one reason to cancel our tour last year. So there are still many challenges for touring and traveling, but we have to manage somehow. Especially when traveling abroad and need to fly.

Finland has always had a wealth of bands and musical talent through the years, how do you feel the music scene there? Have you heard any new bands or new albums you’ve been impressed by? Timo: Yes, we have always had many great bands and it seems that Finnish bands are really appreciated across the world. At least here locally it has been a bit worrying seeing not too many bands starting up. They only have projects. So they create something for some period of time and then stop. Not making their own stuff. Luckily all in all in Finland there are great death and black metal bands coming all the time. Like **Ymir**, **Warmoon Lord**, **Galvanizer** and **Cryptic Hatred**.

Final comments? Timo: Thank you for this interview. Please check our latest album **As In Gardens, So In Tombs** and hope to see you at our gigs.
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
Norway progressive black metal weirdos Bizarrekult are not your typical band. They first appeared in 2021 with Vi Overlevde and they are now ready to unleash Den Tapt Krigen. Featuring unique artwork and their own unique sound, we sent some questions over to mainman Roman.

**How do you feel about how Den Tapt Krigen came out and how it sounds?** I am very satisfied with Den Tapt Krigen. A lot of effort has been put into songwriting, lyrics and sound production. The lyrics are more connected then the first album and songs as well I think. It has a very good flow. When it comes to sound it is also different from the first album, there is more life in guitars, and bass serves as a solid anchor to everything else. We moved away from more modern sound production in order to make room for different interesting ideas on guitars and everything turned out very nicely.

**Why do you feel this visual representation is essential to Bizarrekult’s songs?** The main reason for this is that together with my wife we decided that art should serve as an extension to the music and lyrics. Although it is somewhat limited to owners of physical editions of the album, the cover is speaking to the listener regardless of platform. Provoking, triggering reflections. Also art is serving as a bridge that hints on lyrical content as the lyrics are in Norwegian and it is not the most widespread language.

**How would you describe your style of writing music for Bizarrekult?** I try to avoid being too predictable or classic and build up songs intuitively. It can have many riffs or it can be very simple, anything works. Not really limited by specific style, more about making it not boring for myself. That is why you can have elements of doom, post-metal, post-rock here and there.

**Do you think there are any limits or that there are specific sounds that are necessary to make it a Bizarrekult song?** There is a third album written and I can already tell you that it is different from both l.p.’s but will still have a lot that will make you think immediately about Bizarrekult. Not a dramatic change of course, but different. Similar to how life dynamics is different another day, you don’t have the same mood all the time, even within one day. It is still you, but not a hundred percent the same as yesterday or what it would be tomorrow. Technically speaking it would be a combination of black and roll or black metal style riffing with doom metal atmosphere, post-rock simple melodism. A bit more black-metal than Den Tapt Krigen though.

**What other hobbies and endeavors occupy your time?** I really like outdoor running; I wish I could do more of that. Also longer hiking trips. I have been doing a lot of scale modelling between 2010-2019, but not so much the last two or three years. Probably I burned out from making too many articles for magazines and books.

**Do you view Bizarrekult as a band or would you still consider it a largely solo venture?** That is a very good question. I see myself largely as a composer, a person that gives direction. And for me Bizarrekult is never a band, but something that is a part of my life as there are simply too many personal feelings involved and my wife is also part of Bizarrekult, without her I would have never done any music at all. We had another band together before and we have some music activities that the world might or might not hear that are not related to Bizarrekult that nobody heard. Then I rely and depend on the cooperation with other studio and live musicians, art designer, sound producer. Without them the project would exist only as unfinished bedroom rock, or in a different form than the current one. Are we a band? Are we a collective? An extended family? Community?

**The world is more chaotic and disturbed than ever, do you feel sheltered and safe spending time with nature and away from the craziness that man creates?** Is it possible to be immune from what appears to be man’s self destruction with food and
energy supplies being (seemingly deliberately) decreased and the coming economic collapse? Yes, nature is definitely such a safe space, but then you can’t just walk away and stay there. At least I am not prepared for survivalism, I am a child of civilization, modern society. Social interaction is an obligatory component for neural development, for good and bad. What are we without culture? We live in coexistence with others. The history of humanity is what it is, we need to be concerned about making our lives better, also for our dear ones, our societies. Norway is a great example of societies where people can do a bit more for others around, but I always think it is also possible due to the relatively small population. We can take time to solve problems, but even here it is sometimes difficult to find agreement at work, school, and other communities. People simply have many opinions that should be listened to and respected. When you multiply that process into larger countries, larger communities, with different dynamics it gets complicated to make it all functional and inclusive the way we would like it to be. But you know, I hope for the best, there is always light after darkness, spring after winter, things go in cycles, some are more lucky to live in a better part of the cycle, some are less. Imagine yourself living 100 or 150 years ago…it was much worse with regards to quality of life, working hours, healthcare, etc for an ordinary person, also for women and children. And it is amazing and frightening that life can be so different nowadays from relatively easy living in Scandinavia to countries where there is no electricity outside very large cities.

Do you feel Bizarrekult is a full and accurate depiction of who you are as a person or is this just one facet of who Roman is and what you’re about? I guess I have to figure it out yet. There is a lot of personal stuff: viewpoints, memories, experiences baked into lyrics but it is all multifaceted. Past, present, future, similar to many other people I can be different in different situations, environment, surroundings, time of the day,

Any final comments? Thank you for interesting, thought-provoking questions, I enjoyed answering them. And thank you for kind feedback on the album. It means a lot to me and everyone involved.
3Teeth and Black Magnet have been two of the best industrial metal bands I’ve heard in the past five years. Black Magnet put out their second full length, Body Prophecy, last year. On the eve of their tour with King Yosef, we sent over some questions for mainman James Hammontree.

You're hitting the road in about a week or so- what are your expectations for this tour and any place you’re really looking forward to? Super excited about this tour specifically. Playing some great clubs in some great cities. Always looking forward to coming to NYC, but pretty much every city will have its highlights, particularly due to some of the bands we are playing with. Playing some cities we’ve never played before so I’m looking forward to those places.

Being a die hard fan of bands like Nine Inch Nails, Godflesh, Bile and Ministry, I’ve literally waited decades to hear a band capture that sound and intensity and along came Black Magnet- what was your vision for the band when you decided to write and record your first songs? Do you also feel there's a lack of high quality industrial metal these days? There’s a lot of great modern industrial bands but I felt like there was a lack of heavy guitar driven influence on most newer bands. Not that it doesn’t exist, it’s just maybe a bit more rare and harder to find versus the synth/drum machine only bands that seem more prevalent. The goal was to definitely have a heavy guitar riff influence on the band while still using a ton of synth and influence from early electronic industrial. It is a bit surprising not many modern industrial bands use guitar as the forefront of their sound, but I think there are a few out there for sure. I also wanted to capture a noise rock/no wave sound on top of it all.

Now that you have a full band, what do the newer members add to your original creation with Black Magnet? Aside from really filling out the sound live, we are writing as a 4 piece band and combining everyone’s ideas into the new songs. It’s way easier to focus on the overall creation and vibe of the song when one person isn’t having to worry about every element in the writing process, as well as the performance of recording every instrument. It’s definitely making the most difference live though.

What makes a Black Magnet show special and worth going to? What can fans and new listeners expect? The live shows aim to be harsh, loud, and punishing, yet still with a rhythmic danceable element. We try to pick a range of different sounding songs to keep the set dynamic and encapsulate the whole sound of the band. We hope listeners feel a level of transcendence and out of body while experiencing Black Magnet. Hopefully people can lose themselves in the music and eliminate negative aspects from their mind during the experience. We are playing 3 new songs on this tour which will be on the next album.

When it comes to the construction of your songs what comes first- the riffs or the percussion? Much of the time it will start with either a crushing guitar riff, a simple kick and snare drum pattern, or a heavy arpeggiated synth bassline. Usually it’s a combination of those that get a song idea going. Sometimes it’s as simple as an atmospheric sound of wind or a percussive noise that can inspire the aforementioned elements. Even before the musical elements come into play I try to envision a mood or atmosphere and really feel it in my mind and create a world for that song to exist in. I have a few metaphysical techniques that help me get in the zone and I try to remember the initial feeling during the raw idea for the song.

I really love how your sound is both a straight forward drum groove and guitar riffs, but I feel it's the additional keyboards and percussive sounds that add layers and dynamics to your songs, do you see yourself experimenting a little more on the new material you're writing? Yes and no, I think that we are definitely growing and maturing in songwriting where we can hone in more on the initial idea of the song. I think some elements will get more complex, layered and noisy, while other parts of the song will get more stripped down and simplified for a more direct impact and the essence we are aiming for. Song to sing will vary more. I would like the songs to go in both directions simultaneously to create an even deeper and impactful dynamic. I think the songs across the new album will span quite a wider range sonically than ever before.
King Yosef seems a perfect match to tour with—how did this tour get put together? What are some other bands you would love to go on the road with? King Yosef and I just started talking online after we discovered we were fans of each other's music. We hung out in LA and thought it would be a fitting combo for us to tour together. We booked the tour ourselves. There's really so many bands I would love to tour with it's hard to know where to start. Aside from the classics like Godflesh, Skinny Puppy, NIN, etc… I'd like to tour with modern bands like Code Orange, Ghostmane, and Soft Moon.

What's the best concert you've been to? In the last few years probably Blood Incantation and Jarhead Fertilizer the day after our last show at Saint Vitus, insane musicianship.
The Enigma Division is an Irish progressive metal band that everyone must hear to believe. They have just released their self-titled debut, an album that is easily one of the best debuts ever heard from a metal band. Their progressive metal style fluctuates between brutally heavy to vintage progressive metal. Guitarist Conor McGouran answered some of our questions.

**How did you guys come to put the Enigma Division together and what vision did you have for the direction of the band?** First of all, thank you so much for having me. Myself and Ronan (Burns) started writing the material as far back as 2017. We had already been playing music together since we were kids, so it was always a dream to record an album together. Though having Ben (Wanders), who I had worked with previously in Xerath, come on board really helped elevate it to where it is now. The plan was to do a project that mirrored all the music we liked growing up and shape it into something that made common sense and was relatable to people that weren’t necessarily prog or metal aficionados. Good songs but also had a sense of expansiveness. We jokingly called it Tech-Noir but it’s seem to have stuck now. ‘Tech-Noir’ means the dark side of technology. It was a term coined by James Cameron. The bar in *The Terminator* is also called ‘Tech-Noir’. Film score and synths, particularly 80’s horror & Sci Fi, play a huge influence on our sound in terms of weaving all the tracks together. I use CS-80 and Prophet pads and sounds extensively throughout. Both synths feature heavily in Vangelis’ *Blade Runner* score and Brad Fiedel’s score for *The Terminator*. So basically it is an aesthetic term and we feel it just fits what we do.

**Why did Xerath end and how did you feel about your experience with Xerath?** Yeah, I was nearly four years in Xerath. There are lots of elements at play to why bands break up. We were all just at different stages in our lives and it was becoming increasingly more difficult to do. Rich and Mike went to work on amazing projects for Riot Games and obviously myself and Ben started working on this amongst other stuff. We’re still very good friends. Rich (Thomson) even provided his amazing vocals to our track “Afterglow”, so that was a Xerath reunion of sorts but just stylistically different. I had an amazing experience with Xerath. We recorded a great album together (*III*) and we got see and play incredible places around the world. I also learned a huge amount about the recording process from both Mike and Rich.

I’ve read the comments online, you’ve really blown people away with your playing- describe your approach to writing these type of songs. Wow, well that’s very humbling to hear. I guess I just enjoy playing and thankfully it never felt like a chore but it’s always very rewarding to hear that some people enjoy what you do. The song writing process varies on each track. Normally it begins with myself writing the basic structure and progressions on keyboards or piano, then myself and Ronan flesh it out with guitars, bass and a melodic concept and theme. William Alex Young and Ben played a fundamental role also with lyrics and melodies on this album. Songs like “Afterglow”, “Clarity”, “Echoes” were virtually the same from the demos while others grew into something vastly different from their initial demo state. It’s trial and error until it’s something close to what was in our heads.

**People want to know how do you create these type of riffs- what equipment (guitar, effects, amplification) do you prefer?** I guess I wear my influences on my sleeve when it comes to riffs. *Van Halen*, Nuno, Dimebag, *Freak Kitchen*, *Kings X*, *Nevermore* are amongst the usual suspects that influenced that side of my playing the most. Guitar wise I used a Vigier Excalibur Shawn Lane Model, An Ibanez UV70, An Ibanez RG8 for “The Escapist” and a 1988 Gibson Les Paul Standard. This was my first time using the Kemper for Guitar tones and I’m extremely pleased with it.

**You’ve released this debut independently, was the label interest or did you feel this was the best route to take for the band at this point?** We did have label interest at the beginning but we felt we would rather just do it ourselves. We made this album for ourselves and we didn’t want outside influences meddling with what we were doing. For better or worse, I’m glad we did it this way.
How do you take complex themes and music and make it relatable to the average listener? That was really our mission statement. Naturally we completely accept that not everyone is going to like it but we were extremely conscious of taking an expansive idea and making it relatable. “1977” was the initial track we had written instrumentally. I was always fascinated with Carl Sagan and the Voyager missions. From watching ‘Cosmos’ as a kid to my uncle showing me the first photos of Neptune in 1989. 1977 was of course the year the Voyager missions were launched but it works on a few levels. People began to take an interest in space again and science fiction became embedded in pop culture like it never had before. Probably on its deepest level it mirrors the journey of birth to death. A friend of mine passed away at the beginning of the writing process in 2017 in which their date of birth was also 1977 which was a strange coincidence. The relatability comes I believe with the themes of existential terror, self reflection, grief and finally acceptance and self forgiveness with “Clarity”. They are also linked with the concept of time lyrically and musically alongside the Voyager mission. It’s extremely human at its core. And Sagan’s speech at the end sums it up so profoundly. Plus the chorus sections are hopefully catchy.

How are things in Ireland these days? Has the economy and other societal issues become bad in your country? Ireland is like most places in the western world. It has its good points and its bad points. Thankfully as a musician, I choose to live in a bubble and focus on my own problems and the ones dearest to me. As Billy Joel once sang…”I found that just surviving is a noble fight”.

What are your plans for promoting this album and getting people aware of the band? Well guys like yourself have been a huge help and also a shout out to Oran O’Beirne, Jeff Castanon and Matthew Wilkes for their continued support in regards to pushing the PR side of things. We will be performing a few shows and we are currently working on the logistics of making that happen.

This album stands up as one of the best sounding and most accomplished in heavy music history- it’s the truth, not hyperbole, what would you consider to be a satisfying response? Wow, well I’m speechless. I’m not sure about that. I’m so happy you enjoyed it that much. I guess we just hope that like-minded people enjoy it and it will have a re-playability factor for them.
Girish And The Chronicles have one of the most exciting albums I’ve heard in the past month. Their brand of energetic eighties inspired heavy metal/hard rock is timeless—both fresh and old school. Coming from an isolated part of India, they’ve used the internet and live shows to get word out and the hard work is paying off. Here’s frontman Girish to tell us about it.

I know these songs have been around for awhile, how do you feel about the final result and how it looks and sounds? We’re quite happy about the way it’s come out. The guitars are much closer to the sound we have always loved. Same for the other instruments, which is a blend of the classic ‘80s and a modern mix. We played around with the song structures here and there, which is a treat, while performing live. But most of all, we’re so happy about our debut finally reaching the right audience and getting the recognition it deserves.

What’s the best way to capture that live sound in the studio? For us it’s about being as comfortable as possible in the environment we’re working in. We spend a lot of time creating the right tones, finding the best ways of recording the instruments, including vocals. We don’t always necessarily follow what others do. Sometimes a cheap, unexpected microphone or some guitar pedal that we would never use, ends up giving us what we exactly want. Sometimes some random VSTs just help. Basically we don’t work in a big budget fashion. So it’s all quite spontaneous, and DIY, but it can be a struggle and time consuming. Perhaps such factors add to the real flavor.

What do you hope the listener gets out of your music? We’re all about energy and emotions. For me personally, it’s a lot about either adrenaline in the form of a fast in-your-face track, or deep emotions, in the form of a ballad. That’s exactly what I personally hope for our listeners to feel.

What do you think makes you unique and different from the majority of bands today? I’ve never thought of that actually. But from what I’ve heard from our fans, it’s the sound. We don’t look like huge stars and all, but we like our sound to be larger than life. Well we do produce, mix, master our own albums, with Yogesh Pradhan on the helm, perhaps that really helps us in exploring a lot more and giving endless freedom to experiment with sound.

Any plans to come to the U.S. for shows or tours? What plans do you have to promote Back On Earth? More than plans I guess it’s about, “How do we make it happen”? Perhaps personally visiting and netting people out there might be a start. It is something I’m seriously considering. We don’t generally plan tours or anything after an album, but we’re lucky that we always have shows lined up and we use those opportunities to play our songs. We are visiting Europe, this summer, for a tour. It’ll be focused on Back on Earth for sure.

Are you writing new material? Do you feel pressure to create something that’s even better than what you’ve done before? Yes we really aim at making better records, but it’s not really a challenge. It’s more of a drive.

You’ve been playing and promoting old school, energetic hard rock your whole life. I’m sure people tried to discourage you along the way—what helped keep you on your path and keep writing and playing this music? I’ve always been a musical rebel, so basically I don’t really listen to people on such matters. But yes everyone faces such stuff, quite often too. I just smile and say “Yes”, and get on to what I was doing. Sometimes, I just listen to some of my favorite songs, and say to myself, “There’s nothing better than this”.

What makes this type of music timeless and relevant no matter what year it is? In a poetic language, it’s the heart and soul that’s put into making it. It’s also the fact that once this music gets into you, there’s no turning back. It stays forever. Well, that’s how it is, at least for me. That’s something a lot of people don’t get, if they’re not into that stuff.

Your vocals reveal a strong personality and immense talent, how have you developed into this type of singer and what are the challenges you have as a vocalist? It has been a long journey. I started it as a teenager and I was so much in love with it, that there was nothing else I wanted to do. I practiced like crazy. Now it’s been many years since I quit smoking and drinking. For a singer, it’s “You’re your own
enemy”. So being careless about it is not an option. Of course it was different when I was a teenager or in my early 20s, where I was like “Nothing can stop me”. But as I grew older, I realized silly little mistakes would eventually affect me later on in life. But no matter what phase of life, I am the kind of a person who’s never satisfied. That is very important to me, I think. I like to keep improving and get better every step. I don’t like flying high on compliments. In fact, I don’t know how to do that. I’m just grateful that everyone has shown their love and support, but as far as singing goes, to me it’s a lifelong subject which you can never complete.

Any final comments? Thanks for having me on the interview. We’re so glad everyone is digging Back on Earth. It’s literally a part of our journey when we had just started out. And different songs were written in different regions, during different phases. Thank you for being a part of it and receiving it so well!
We had this interview with Nathan from Great Cold Emptiness in the last issue, but this is the complete interview. I originally edited it to better fit the digital issue, with the intentions of having it on the site unedited. However, since this digital issue is just that- no need to edit for printing costs, I wanted this to run in its entirety.

How do you feel about the new album and did you achieve what you set out with this record? 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 am also notorious for being pretty ambivalent to the concept of riffs, which is why I dislike the vast majority of metal genres for their over-reliance on them, but I wanted to challenge myself and make an album that focused on the guitar more so 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, assisting 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 45 minutes. I’m very satisfied with the final product, despite it being around 2 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, I’m listening to “Xanadu,” my favorite song by them, right now as I write this. The R30 live version has a particular primality to it I find it insanely inspiring, 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 more 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? What do you feel is the primary thematic element to this story which you want to leave your listeners feeling? 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 did not go back and edit them after the fact. 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. I took about 6 or 7g of psilocybin mushrooms and hung out on the beach while it drizzled. One of the others was sober, so I’ll tell you I was not hallucinating, but I saw a
massive minke whale hang out about 20-30 feet in front of me. Because of Covid, the shipping routes along the fleuve weren’t being used as much, so the whales all came back. The event can be described in the first song, “The Patron Saint of Whalewatching”. The other songs meditate on similar sorts of themes that I uncovered after the trip. “To Die for the Ideal” harkens back to the event that occured in 2019 which inspired my second album, *Death Gifted a Bouquet*. The song is simple and about an afternoon sitting at a bar in Montreal (Siboire, my love) on the infamous Rue St Laurent and seeing people entering and exiting a church nearby, thinking about how all pain and suffering can be healed through the power of forgiveness. The following song, “She Sang of Hyperborea” details the struggle of the self, the corruption of sin and the uncertainty of knowing if one is worthy of salvation. The underlying theme of forgiveness returns, and it’s here where the title of the album appears. The power of forgiveness is not only material and human, but also a fundamental attribute of one’s ancestors. Lastly, the final song, “With Friends Like These” (taken from the legendary Dark Brotherhood questline in Skyrim [I am a huge Elder Scrolls fan]) details the eventual revelation, which is that the power of companions is all one needs in life. And that ontological evil can be destroyed. I will say that, although the lyrics are melodramatic and, at times, corny, it’s an album with a simple and relatable theme.

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. The first demo and EP were their own little collection as well, symbolizing the primal love of nature. So the debut album archives those memories and feelings of uncertainty in a new country and those crucial first few steps into the unknown. 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. Shit gets real. 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. And now, 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. And so, 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.

I feel this could make a really interesting, introspective film adaptation- any plans to create a full length feature with your music serving as the soundtrack? After all, there is a cinematic feel to much of the music on your albums. 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. As I’ve said above, I have a fascination with psychedelics, specifically LSD. I’ve been able to (safely) traverse the crevices of my mind in order to create such things. I am immensely proud of them and 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. The core will remain, myself, Preston and Meghan. As will the core sonic element being that of Blackgaze. But I want to bring great minds in from all aspects of the artistic spectrum. I often think of what a live GCE-show would look like and I know I don’t want to play in dingy dives for pennies. I think, if everything goes to plan, we promote whatever the new album is and go and do select shows in select venues (Churches, parks, by the ocean etc. Basically, whatever fits the mood of the album) and then record a live film of that event. I want to work with local breweries, hopefully to sell local products at my shows, instead of mass market trash like Molson or Budweiser. Essentially, make GCE a cultural artistic experience and residency that contains film, painting, sculpture, installation art etc. in a formal, public setting. Ideally, for free.

I assume you’ve spent much of your life in cold climates of the Northeast (although Massachusetts-like New York, summers are quite warm and beautiful) and Canada (although Quebec is obviously urban)- 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 Québécois 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 Québécois 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.
As the creator of this expansive sound you’ve created with Great Cold Emptiness- how do your song ideas originate? What comes more natural- the initial idea or riff, or the process of building that into these epic songs that have various moods and tempos? So, as I said above, I tend to loathe the concept of a riff. I find it constricting in all aspects and the reason why I don’t like most metal and the metal subculture. The first thing I start with is the feel and aesthetic of the album. We, as a band, are working on the 4th full length album, and I already have the next 6 or 7 planned after that. I came up with the song titles, album name, color palette and all that first. I find that it helps so much with consistency and authenticity. A downside is that I don’t have tracks that are leftover. I always write what I need for the album and if I don’t like how a song is going, I scrap it. I usually tell right away. So, I’ll start with a strong thought on how everything should sound and look and feel, and then I begin composing the main melodies and chord progression. My true love as an artist is Electronica, which, historically, had been how I started writing music. I was about 9 or 10 when I started to write my own stuff, wanting to emulate Paul van Dyk and Tiesto and all of them (can you tell I liked Trance?) I found myself mixing that with blackgaze back in 2010, right in the genre’s heyday. Now, I was wicked young, so I didn’t change the game. But I was there right when it started, forging my own little path and releasing albums on Ukrainian record labels at 13 years old. After the main skeleton of the song is done, which is the main melodies, and pads and all the synths, along with the programmed drums, I start getting with Preston to do the bass and guitars. Together we tackle the guitars until that’s all set and done, then I tinker with it and send it off to Meghan for vocals. Then mixing and mastering. At least this is how we made *Immaculate Hearts Will Triumph*. I think, and this is the result of my brain being more electronic oriented, that my biggest weakness is the inorganicism that sometimes comes out in our songs. I want to change that for future releases and record it more together, in the same room, so it sounds more intimate. Hard to explain.

If you were to write the story of your life for the next twenty years- what would it be? Do you feel you are in control of your own destiny, or do you feel there are outside forces that create obstacles to what you wish to become? I am absolutely in control of my own life and destiny, as is everybody. There is no such thing as luck. Everything that can be done, can be done, with enough willpower and effort. In 20 years, which is a long time, I wish to be creating films based off of my own universe that I use as a setting for my novels. I will be living in a loft in Old Québec City, or a little cottage in Île d’Orléans. I find that it is absolutely paramount for any artist with lofty dreams to put aside distraction. David Lynch says that he eats the same meal every day and lives a vigorous routine. This must be emulated, as it allows the mind to be free of any distractions that hinder the creative process. I’ve cut a lot of people out of my life, simply because I do not want distractions that hinder my art. A lot of the time, these distractions can be family related or relationships or other commitments. The creation of this parallel world, which I personally believe is more real than reality, is, by far, the most important thing in my entire life. I write every single day. Even if not to advance the novels themselves, but at least a few thousand words in the lore, or side writing projects and exercises. Hopefully, I will have something to share, literature wise, soon.

What does the future hold for Great Cold Emptiness this year? The future of Great Cold Emptiness is very bright, if you appreciate artistic evolution. It is not if you believe an artist should grow stale and owes something to their fans. Like I mentioned, we are working on our 4th full length album, which focuses on an integration with my writing and universe and the music. It follows a character of mine that I am in indirect contact with. I’m also working on the subsequent albums. A few demos have been made and they sound absolutely insane. The good news is that we will be prioritizing digital albums over physical ones. This gives us the opportunity to release when we want. The market is changing. Big artists like Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift dominate the indie vinyl market, pressuring factories to print thousands of copies, delaying the rest of us. My label, Flowing Downward, deserves
all the support it can get and more, for their patience. I would like, and I cannot make promises, but because we are not going to rely on releasing the physical copies alongside the digital at the same time, to have the next album out by early next year. We are about halfway done writing it, and hopefully sales from this album will be good enough to get a team to work on it. It will be bigger than anything I’ve ever put out. And the next one will be even bigger. And so on.

**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.
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
This is the second part of our feature looking back at Last Crack’s 1991 release, *Burning Time*. Last issue we had an in depth discussion with vocalist Buddo, this time around we have guitarist Paul Schluter sharing some memories.

**How did you feel about the debut album and what did you hope to accomplish when you started writing and preparing *Burning Time***?

I really wish that *Sinister Funkhouse #17* had a better production. It actually kind of spoils that album for me and I do really love all of the songs. There is such great raw energy there and it would be so much more listenable with better tones. I’d love to someday get those tracks and remix them. An interesting sidenote: In 2004 we did a showcase at SXSW in Texas. We ended up running into Dimebag and Vinnie from *Pantera*. I had some demo CDs with me of new material we were working on, so I approached them and said “hey guys I’m from *Last Crack*.” They both immediately shouted, “*Sinister Funkhouse #17*!” It was like a scene from a movie, totally crazy. They were so cool and said how much they love that album. Dimebag said to me, “keep doing those squawks man”. Squawks are pinch harmonics on guitar and we do them all over the album. Dimebag did them all the time too. We had heard through the grapevine that those guys were fans of our music but that was total proof. Our A&R man at Roadrunner sent me a photo of a Christmas card he got from *Pantera* between our first two albums and they were asking if they could get an advance copy of the new record. We had used up a lot of our material on the first album. The band had written a handful of other songs to use for the next one but as the time grew closer to fly to L.A. to record, we only had about half of the songs we needed. A friend offered us an empty house to rehearse in. I went there every day around noon and wrote riffs before the band showed up each day. I think “Energy Mind” was written there, we completed “Dirt Messiah” and a couple others. I remember “Wicked Sandbox” being one of the last songs that we wrote. At that time we were rehearsing at a different friend’s house who was kind of a partier. Buddo came early one day and ended up interviewing the drunken woman who is on the intro to “Kiss A The Cold.” I think one of the things that sets the two albums apart musically is that Don and I learned a little bit of music theory and scales from a friend of ours. It really changed things for me guitar-wise and in my writing. Previously we had been flying more from the seat of our pants and didn’t really know much beyond the basic blues scales, we just did what we thought sounded good. It was a lot more random. The band had also matured a lot and had honed our playing and writing together. I’d love to have gotten the chance to hear what we would have come up with for our third album at that time. We all always believed in the band and desired greatness. We strived to be one of the best bands in the world and always worked really hard to accomplish that goal. Getting Dave Jerden to produce our album was literally a dream come true and it fired us up even more.

**What are some memories you have from the recording of the album? Did you feel you were creating something that would be very special?**

One of the greatest memories I have while recording *Burning Time* is the day I recorded my solo on “Mini Toboggan.” I didn’t have anything prepared and had tried a couple of takes but wasn’t getting anything really great. Our engineer, Bryan Calstrom, asked if I’d mind if he went and grabbed some lunch and showed me how to punch myself in. When he left, I turned down the lights in the control room and took in the moment. I was alone in a multi-million dollar recording studio recording my second album and truly living my dream. It was complete freedom to be in there by myself and I felt super confident trying all kinds of
crazy stuff that I wouldn’t have been comfortable doing with anyone else being there. I grabbed my glass slide and in a couple of takes came up with the soaring slide solo that is on the record. I do think that we felt that we were creating something special and we put everything we had into making that record. We always believed in ourselves and what we were doing and it’s incredible that the music we made has lasted with people for thirty plus years, especially since the band disappeared while we were still on the rise. It’s actually painful to think of what could have been had we lasted even a little longer.

“Wicked Sandbox” is the perfect opener. Can you explain your guitar playing on this track? The leads are perfect and there’s such an energy to those riffs and the wicked groove you have going on. “Wicked Sandbox” was a great opener and Dave Jerden helped us to sequence the first side of the album perfectly. The main riff includes many of the aforementioned squawks that Dimebag liked. I wrote that riff and I find it very interesting how similar it is to Metallica’s ‘Enter Sandman’ which was being recorded across town in another L.A. studio at the time. Our drum guy “The Drum Doctor” would come in and say he had just been over at a studio setting up a drum kit for Lars. We never heard their song until we were finished with our album but it’s incredible that we had such similar riffs being recorded at the same time in the same city. My solo for “Wicked” is one of my faves. I’ve always loved playing it even years later. It comes screaming in and then drops down into a mellow section before climbing at the end and leading into Don’s wild solo that follows.

“Mini Toboggan” I remember hearing on the radio and it seemed to be the most popular track on the album, it’s such a musical contrast to the urgency of “Wicked Sandbox”- how did you get such a clean guitar tone? I read comments on youtube where this song is posted- several people calling this the “perfect song” and “unforgettable,” what do you think makes it so special? (On a side note- there’s a few songs on Runheadstartscreaming that have a similar vibe to this track which I love- I wish more people listened to that great album as well) For “Mini Toboggan” I used a Roland Jazz Chorus JC-120 amp which provided a crystal clear, icy tone that fit the song well. I think that the sound of the music lent itself to Buddo’s association with snow and sledding. The music and lyrics are a perfect fit and that is a big part of what makes it special. It creates a total atmosphere that pulls you right into it. Originally that song was called “Chocolate Church” and had totally different lyrics. It completely changed when Buddo pulled out some lyrics in the vocal booth that he had in a notebook. And yes, I agree about Runheadstartscreaming. After Buddo left the band our management searched across the country to help us find a new vocalist. Shawn Anthony Brown was a great fit as an excellent vocalist and true friend. He was a big fan of the band and we worked harder than ever to come back to where we left off. Unfortunately we never got another solid contract even after showcasing at the biggest show I’ve ever played in my life at the Dynamo Festival in Holland. That album is loaded with incredible songs and needs to be heard. If you search Last Crack on Apple Music or Spotify it’s there.

“Energy Mind” This song has a heaviness similar to “Wicked Sandbox”- what can you say about that opening riff? It’s definite unique. “Energy Mind,” I wrote that riff and most of the parts of that song. It’s definitely unique and I wish I could remember more about how I came up with that. The chords are very unorthodox. I wrote it at the empty house we were using to rehearse in. I had been collaborating with my friend Gary Kealy from the band Rapscallion, writing riffs together and he had a great riff that I asked if I could use in there. It only comes up once at about the 1:30 mark. It’s the only time we’ve used anything from someone outside of the band.

“My Burning Time” has a tone and riff similar to something that The Edge from U2 could come up with. This is a laid back, chill type of track. Whenever I listen to this album, first song hits real hard, second song brings an emotional and storytelling
element, third song brings more energy (no pun intended), but then this song puts me (or any listener) into a sense of calmness and comfort. Was that the intention? For “My Burning Time” I had recently bought a rack mount guitar effect processor and was playing around with delay settings. I agree that it has that sort of bouncing delay that The Edge uses but it wasn’t directly influenced by that. It’s an easy comparison though because of Buddo having such a Bono sound to his vocals. It’s actually influenced more by Eddie Van Halen’s similar use of the delay in “Cathedral”. The same effect processor inspired me to write the “Mini Toboggan” riff. “My Burning Time” is definitely one the most special songs that we’ve written and is one of my favorites. It creates its own soaring atmosphere and is powerful without being super heavy. Buddo orchestrated the other band members’ parts at the end to accent my ending riff and it’s really unique. We were planning “My Burning Time” to be our next music video release. We had a great concept for it. Unfortunately, we didn’t make it that far. It was released as a CD single though.

... and then bam! “Precious Human Stress” lives up to that title haha. Where the hell did you come up with that insane riff in the beginning? Did come from a place of chaos for you? “Precious” was a quirky riff that I came up with at practice. A lot of our music was created that way with whatever riff flew out of my hands at that moment. We worked for hours on making it continually change time signatures. It was really hard to put together but we had a lot of fun doing it. It’s always one that needs to be rehearsed when we are going to play it live because it can be hard to get it right and it could be a total trainwreck if we stumble anywhere on it. Again, Buddo found inspiration in the tone of the music lyrically for a great fit.

The placement of songs and the way they flow into each other is yet another brilliant move, the segue from “Stress” to “Love Craig” just shows how diverse an album this is. Every song unique. Every song a journey but yet it’s all connected. The pace is slower, sort of mid paced, but those guitars are raw and noisy, emotionally intricate - I think this song is a great example of how every note counts - it’s an identifiable style that not many guitarists are able to discover about themselves. “Every song a journey but yet it’s all connected”. That’s a great way to describe the album and also a great way to describe the band. We felt free to do whatever we wanted musically, not staying with any particular musical style and we defied being any one thing. Our songs ran the gamut of metal, hard rock, funk, jazz and even commercial rock at times. Everything was our genre but we always got lumped in with metal which was frustrating. Our true background was more classic rock bands. The main riff for “Love, Craig” was brought in by Don. He also plays the outro solo that ends the song. You don’t hear a lot of songs that end with an unaccompanied guitar solo. It’s really cool that it ends that side of the album too. My solo in the middle of the song has a Middle Eastern feel to it, using a harmonic minor scale. I had never really played anything like that before and it’s one of my pre-planned, constructed solos.

I feel the second side of this album is more experimental. “Kiss A The Cold” is quirky, some stop and start parts. How did this song come together? “Kiss A The Cold” is a combination musically of my parts and Buddo’s. My riff starts the song and all of the other intricate and heavy parts are what I contributed. Buddo’s parts are where the music straightens out a bit in the middle (“Mr. Sexuality”...”Simplicity”). My solo on this is more constructed and planned and Don’s is an improvised, wild one that follows.

“Love or Surrender” is a bizarre interlude - where did that come from? this runs into the weirdness of the start of “Mack Bolasses”... your guitar playing recalls “Mini Toboggan” stylistically. I feel this is the unsung hero of the album. It’s a little bizarre, catchy as hell, and hits the listener in the gut. And then around the 4 and a half minute mark there’s that fast instance of insanity before a return to the
chorus= a small thing- but another little thing that is so memorable and gives a contrast to the quieter more comforting parts of the song. “Love or Surrender” was a thing that Buddo used to play around with on his delay pedal. He used to do it at sound checks before our shows. It’s a nice interlude between songs reminiscent of what Freddie Mercury did on a Queen album. He recorded his friend and ex-wife with a microcassette recorder for the intro just before we left for L.A. “Mack Bolasses” is one that I sometimes forget about although I really like it a lot. It creates a cool mellow mood and is a great live song to pull people in. And then we’d smack them with the middle section of craziness. It’s a great example of what I used to call “Buddo throwing a wrench in it”. We’d be writing something and he’d sometimes want to throw in something that basically seemed like it wouldn’t work or fit. We’d always find a way to do it. I didn’t like that at first but I grew to appreciate that it helped to make us even more unique.

“Blue Fly Fish Sky”: the first few times I listened to this album, I didn’t understand this song. Why is this short, happy little tune on this album? The “mushy” lyrics, happy visual aspect to the lyrics, but I eventually fell in love with it and think it’s an essential addition to this album- what are your thoughts about this track? Buddo brought “Blue Fly” in as a complete song and we all added our parts to make it more of a Last Crack song. It’s completely different from a lot of the other songs but we liked it. “Shelter” from the first album is a similar out of character song for us. Both are more of our commercial rock side. This was going to be our third single release and the record company was going to do a music video for it as well. It definitely is an unapologetic, mushy love song.

“Papa Magaya” cool track, it actually feels like it would fit on a Muzzy Luctin album lol. I feel like this one of the albums more straight forward tracks. “Papa Mugaya” is kind of a sleeper on the album. I believe it’s about someone who was destined to succeed but never did. It’s pretty close to what actually happened with the band. I think lyrically Buddo wrote that out of a fear of what he didn’t want to happen. I used an Ibanez Alex Skolnick model guitar with a Floyd Rose tremolo for the solo on that one. Very out of character from my trusty Paul Reed Smith Custom that I played on everything else. “We believed in you, it’s just too bad you didn’t.”

“Down Beat Dirt Messiah”- why do you feel this worked best as the closing track (if I’m not considering “Oooh” a proper track)? I thought this brought back some cool experimentation with your playing. Quirky, unique, and identifiable. I had the riff for Dirt Messiah for a long time and we kicked around with it at practice often. We could never get past the «Make it happen, I can do anything» part because I only had the riff completed up to there. We would always get stuck and it sat for so long that we couldn’t find anything to fit it. Then, many months later, while we were practicing in the empty house, we tried again and were still stuck. We stopped and while we were discussing it Todd casually played a descending “bu-bump, bu-bump, bu-bump, bum” line on the bass and I said “that’s it!” It was all we needed to complete the song. The way the song trails off and fades is fitting to end with and segue into “Oooh.” “Oooh” was a last minute addition before we went to record. It’s a great message and great little song. It sums up the album really nicely. I have heard there’s a little bar in Tokyo that plays it every night at bar time as a closing song and it’s also been played at some funerals.

Were there any songs recorded that didn’t make it on to the album? There was a song that we had planned to record for the album and we even attempted it during the sessions. It’s called “A Perfect Way”. It’s in the vein of “Blue Fly” and was a nice song. I only have a rough demo of it from demo sessions we did during the recording of our limited edition “Salty Swabby” / “PCT” pink vinyl 7” that we did for Red Decibel Records / Twin Tone in 1990.

Your guitar playing is unique with everything I’ve heard from you- I can recognize a Paul Schluter riff, how do you approach your writing and playing guitar? What are your influences? Thank you! That’s the greatest compliment to have my own unique thing on guitar that is recognizable and my own. I feel very blessed to be able to sit down anytime with a guitar and come up with music and riffs. I have just always plopped my hands down on something on guitar and it comes. Once I have the initial seed the rest just comes together. Sometimes I have to dig a bit but it’s pretty effortless and I’m so thankful for that. I’m currently working on writing complete songs, writing all of the lyrics and melodies as well as the music and it’s coming naturally to me in a similar way.
I remember reading about this album in Metal Maniacs and I know many people who fell in love with this album, it’s timeless, genre-less and means so much to music lovers- why do you think it holds such an appeal to listeners? How do you feel when you get people telling you how they feel about it? Many people have said that Burning Time was ahead of its time and I agree. Had we stayed together for even one more album I think we would have found more success. The huge growth from the first album to our second would have continued and we would have matured to write better, more accessible songs. After the end of the band I remember watching bands like Pearl Jam and Alice In Chains getting more and more popular and I knew that we could have been in that same camp. We just didn’t get a chance to do it. We were breaking barriers and forging our own path. Music was drastically changing at that time and it would have been a perfect opportunity for us to get in there. Sometimes things that are different aren’t easy to take in at first but they are longer lasting. You can hear the fire and passion in our music and that may be a part of it as well. It’s real and it’s different. It has a unique flavor but once you try it, you grow to love it. I’m very proud of the work we’ve done and that others appreciate it. I’m also sad at the opportunities lost. My life wouldn’t be the same as it is now if we had continued and I’m very happy with where I’ve landed. I’m a music producer and own a recording studio, I have a guitar in my hand everyday and continue to play live regularly with my other projects. My whole life is music and I’m very content.

Runheadstartscreaming is great in its own right, what were some obstacles getting that out to the public? Runheadstartscreaming is a great album. We gave it our best push at the time but due to poor management choices we were told to get out of our contract with Roadrunner and we were unable to secure another solid contract.

What led to the reunion and writing/ recording of The Up Rising? How do you feel about that record now that it’s been out a few years? Over the years little things have popped up that have gotten the band back together like reunion shows, etc. We basically are all standing in the rehearsal room saying “why aren’t we still a band?” We still had it so we fired up the machine and started writing. I was very proud to have been able to produce The Uprising. I feel that it’s a great record with solid songs. We secured a deal with Megadeth’s David Ellefson’s label EMP but then Covid hit just as we were starting our push. The label folded and the record didn’t end up getting the exposure it needed.

Any plans to record new music with Last Crack? Any live shows possible this year? Unfortunately nothing is in the works for the band at this time. Buddo has moved to Mexico and is pretty much retired from music so the final nail may be in the Last Crack coffin. I’ll never say never though. This band has risen from the ashes so many times that I don’t think it can ever truly die. In the meantime, catch up to us by listening to our latest release, The Uprising. We put everything we had into it and it still has the fire. Stay tuned.

I can’t thank Buddo and Paul enough for taking this time to reflect and give such details. You can feel the enthusiasm, the sincerity, and heartbreak these guys had during their time together. When Sinister Funkhouse #17 came out in 1989 it showed the band’s potential. “Slicing Steel” was easily my favorite song on the album. Burning Time is simply legendary, it’s sad they did not become as big as Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, or any of those alternative rock/metal bands from their era. Burning Time was a complete album, unlike anything that is recorded anymore. Every song essential to the album, each song sounds different, yet it’s always the same band, the same personalities. Buddo left the band and was replaced by Shawn Brown. Fortunately the Runheadstartscreaming sessions were released. Shawn had a more soulful voice, one of the best underground singers I’ve ever heard, but didn’t have Buddo’s imposing personality. Nonetheless songs like “Squeeze It,” “Speak the Ocean,” and “Fill the Cup” are almost as great as “Energy Mind” and “Wicked Sandbox.” Shawn has a website with many songs he’s released through the years and everyone should check them out. All was quiet for Last Crack, and members went on to other bands like Mind Ox, White Fear Chain, and Muzzy Luctin- all great in their own right, but the magic that Buddo, Paul, Don Bakken, Todd Winger, and Chris Harvey create as Last Crack is unlike any other band. Fortunately they recorded and released The Up Rising in 2019. Sure, it was not as great as Burning Time (nothing is!), but the magic was still there and songs like “Siren Song” and “Iceile” prove they still had it in them. Who knows what the future holds for this band. Hopefully it’s not the end and maybe there will be more live shows in the future.
French progressive death metalers Misanthrope have been around since the late eighties and early nineties. They have always been one of the most unique bands around and this ideology is also reflected in frontman Philippe Courtois de L’Argil iere’s label Holy Records. As Misanthrope releases their new album, Les Declinistes, we needed to track him down and catch up.

How do you feel about the finished product and how Les Declinistes came out? Hello Brett, so great to hear from you, it was about twenty five years since our last interview together. I’m really great, we are under February French Doom and we are in the middle of the promotion of our new studio album Les Déclinistes. The last one AXΩ (Alpha X Omega: Le magistère de l’abnégation) which was our tenth full length came out six years ago in 2017. We are super satisfied with the production (Henosis Studio) we took around seven years to complete it. We have superb products, we have normal c.d. jewel cases with twenty pages booklets, c.d. digipack, two new t-shirts designs and four colors double l.p. vinyls gatefold with lyrics insert. It’s out on Holy Records like in the good old nineties days, you can purchase it on www.holyrecords.com. It’s also out on all streaming platforms for free. We won’t get a lot of money this year but we are in an artistic poetic apotheosis. The meaning of Les Declinistes design a current of ideas and analyzes of thinkers who believe that our human civilization is in decline, culturally or geopolitically. We are announcing the downfall humanity since of debut split c.d. Hater of Mankind composed in 1990. Here we are.

I see that you have re-recorded four songs from the past for this release, why did you decide to do this? There is sometime a misunderstand on this c.d., it’s a new studio album composed of twelve classics or unreleased songs that Misanthrope composed between 1990-1996. It’s Misanthrope’ thirty fourth anniversary gift for all these years of unwavering fans supports through three decades. Misanthrope’s fans have been asking so much for an album like this. This is not a best of album but completely new studio album of new versions. All the classics are re-recorded and re-arranged. The band worked with the same team which did the production of the Misanthrope Immortel 2021 re-recordings. For me more personally it’s nostalgic trip back in time to the nineties at the dawn of the avantgarde doom death movement.

One thing that always blows me away about Misanthrope is Jean Jacques Moreac’s bass playing- this guy’s talent is unreal- what do you feel his style and creativity adds to Misanthrope? I love him, he is my hero. Jean-Jacques Moréac is in Misanthrope since exactly first week of January 1993. So, we’re playing together over the last thirty years, it’s so great. He is my friend now; he is an easy man with fun, with a very strong musical vision and scales and a fantastic playing and live performance. I remember first time when I saw him on stage back in January 1993 in his former band Krakabra I was blown away. I jump on the stage after his gig and told him to call me urgently as soon as possible to join me in Misanthrope. Now we are brother in life, I’m the Godfather of his little girl. We are mixing metal art creation, life obstacle and privacy. He is not human; he is from outer space with his instrument. Gaël Féret and Anthony Scemama are super musicians too, they are also my little brothers, they kill and we are all four together in Misanthrope over the last 20 years.
I view Misanthrope has a band that fills the Celtic Frost void. I’m not saying you sound exactly like them, but you do have that avantgarde dark metal sound and you never know where a Misanthrope song will take you- do you feel Misanthrope values that creativity? After thirty four years of composing music, we are following the “inspiration of the moment” when we are writing a song. We do not try to be more progressive, darker of more technics- this is not the point of Misanthrope music, we are composing our songs fluently, songs are coming out from our riffing who follow a tranquil stream, but our spirit and creation are frenzy. We are compositing what we like and nothing else. First of all, we are composing good song for us four and if people like it’s nice. We are not a product, there is no economic expectation on our albums. We are not corrupt by the music business; we are four artists who go the way creations bring them. For our darkness, sadness and mystery are engulfed in our riffing compositions. But I do not feel Misanthrope been a band who follow any trend or anything, we are not like those new bands who became pirates metallers or whatever dragons’ fellows and Vikings worshippers. But we have “a little music box of inspirations in the back of our brain”, and for me Into The Pandemonium is the one. This album is a milestone and it’s a part of my life inspiration since 1987. I’m a real fan of this album. For Les Déclinistes I really wanted to find a pure nostalgic feeling of my cherished movement the avantgarde doom death scene from the nineties. The twelve tracks are purely between nostalgia and modernity in a maelstrom of musical creation ecstasy.

Do you have any shows or tours planned for this year? We have a French tour of over twelve shows in the pipeline. We are dreaming to play live outside France, visiting U.S.A., Japan, South America one day and been back on the Europe stages too. We are not very lucky on touring abroad, we are almost cursed on this topic. Gig promoters book the plane tickets we will come to your town.

What’s new with Holy Records? Your label always put together such quality cd packages with each release, the new digital age must be sad because people can just click on an album and play it- they don’t get to experience the whole artwork and visual experience from a handheld product. Holy Records is strong, active and alive today. It’s the same company who release debut Nightfall, Orphaned Land and Septic Flesh back in 1992-1994. As you know everything changed and we are in a perpetual adaptation to the human system. We are proud of what we archived with Holy Records back then with quality design, productions and Digipacks. From 1992 to 2000 it was our golden years, but we did not realize it back then… we were only moving forward like avid metal fans that we still are. On the 24th September we did a huge party in Paris to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Holy Records. It was a superb day, there is all Holy Maniacs videos on YouTube. We built a tribute band to play live Holy Records nineties classics under the name Holy Maniacs (Official Tribute Band to Holy Records nineties’ performing exclusively songs from: Argile, Godsend, Legenda, Nightfall, On Thorns I Lay, Orphaned Land, Serenity, Septic Flesh, Tristitia and Yearning) and Misanthrope headlined the evening. It was my most emotional day of been an artist producer. For information we have a new website www.holyrecords.com with lots of cool nineties original items. Check it out.

How do you feel about the current state of music? Has the ease of the internet and online streaming helped Misanthrope or hurt the band? It’s really shitty, every year our income is coming down and down. But we will stay strong with a head up right until the end. We will not betray our fans. We will stay authentic and inspired or we will disappear. Today there is too much music to listen to, we are surrounded by a lot of crap, a lot of fake artists, with a plastic computer sound. An adolescent who arrives today in the extreme metal scene have to much choice and way too many things to listen to. His focus is diluted and he is zapping from one song to another. The concept of band nor “album” or concept album is dead for the new generations. And this is sad because way too much superficial. If you listen only to “La Démiurge” from our new album, it’s a killer track, but this does not represent Misanthrope- you have to listen to the complete album several times to start entering into it. I’m so sad for the new generation, they too often lost the “curiosity and delight” which are the basis of pleasure while listening to music. That’s what we try to explain in Les Déclinistes 2023 technology habits will ruin art and creativity. And I will not spend my life in making video for tic toc to promote Misanthrope. I just want to create my music with the three others members with strength and playing for “passion and authenticity” and nothing else.
What’s new and exciting with the French metal scene? Any bands you would recommend? Are S.U.P. still doing music? Now the scene is mega huge, we have hundreds of great bands. Yes, I recommend Holy Maniacs, Argile, Barabbas, Alcest, Hangman Chair, Gojira, Malemort, ADX, Loudblast, Orakle, Agressor, Deathspell Omega, But Aus Nord, The Great Old Ones, and Sortilège are back. Regarding S.U.P., you can find all their hot information on their Facebook page.

Any final comments? Thank you so much for this great interview, it was years since the last time I did an interview in English language. I’m happy to find again Transcending the Mundane support. You know my attraction for U.S.A. metal music. I will be for the first time in New York and Tampa Florida late this 2023. Hope to have a beer together Brett. If you know any cool people in Tampa who can help me for a decent visit/trip of the town, I’m open to spend time around this death metal city. Promotors contact us for gigs and you readers if you want French exotic avantgarde extreme metal erotica listen to Misanthrope music with a glass of champagne in the hand. Enjoy life and join Misanthrope.
Colorado death thrashers Necropanther have been one of the most respected bands in the American underground metal scene. Their new album, Betrayal, is coming out now and we looked forward to chatting with the band about several topics.

The new album is out and ready for public consumption—how do you feel about it? Joe Johnson: We set out to make the best record we could. We went to the ends of the earth to do it, and I’m satisfied that we succeeded with Betrayal. If this is how we’re remembered, what we’re remembered for, what defines us as a band, I can live with that.

The pandemic itself was the challenge that set the stage for Betrayal. We released its predecessor, The Doomed City, late in 2019, on the eve of the pandemic. As you may know, in addition to our full length program, we have a series of EPs that are written and produced by each member of the band. We completed Et Unyttig Liv right before the pandemic hit, and then we were in lockdown, such that we recorded all of In Depths We Sleep remotely, social distancing even during masked drum sessions.

Ordinarily, we would have played shows during 2020 to support The Doomed City. In 2021, there were a few starts and stops as things tried to open up. We ultimately concluded it was more fruitful to focus on demoing and recording.

Our last two records, The Doomed City and Eyes of Blue Light, are both high quality, personal, collaborative records that say important things about us as individuals and as a band. For listeners and for ourselves, we could take our pick and not be wrong. We didn’t want to repeat either of those records, either in process or in quality. Once we realized we had an indefinite time period when live shows were going to be a challenge, we decided it was important to take as much time as needed to make the next record, which became Betrayal, decisively better than anything we’ve done before.

We’ve been demoing, practicing, workshopping, and refining these songs for two years. It’s been all-consuming. The band and the new songs became our only social obligation. We rehearsed like we were a new band that hadn’t played together before. We stopped playing the old songs. Finishing the record feels like the end of my life in a way, since this is what became my life. It was challenging to say that it was done and to end our practice in that way.

We’ve owned it by ourselves for long enough. It’s time for it to have its own life in the world. We tried to take real artistic risks. I like to think that we did it without violating what our fans would expect, but not everyone is willing to go on every adventure. The best music isn’t heard, but overheard. Betrayal is the sound of our practice space from that time.

Marcus Corich: Betrayal has been such an amazing endeavor it’s become difficult to assess or appraise it with any objectivity for me. I cannot wait to unleash this thing—we truly did go to the ends of the earth and make this album our lives to be where we are today.

This album means an incredible amount to me. I hope we have delivered to any of our fans who have been keeping score at home and following Necropanther’s trajectory a new and elevated development of our band. I think we have continued our personal goals of enhancing our collaborative effort and creative process overall, as well as working deliberately to challenge norms and convention within metal music. Additionally, I hope this album resonates with new listeners. We’re all about growing an inclusive and welcoming community within metal.

Every one of us pushed our musical abilities and ourselves in creating this album. Betrayal is the first Necropanther record featuring Paul’s solos and my vocals. Haakon and Joe are already incredible players and they took their abilities to an entirely new level. That aspect was likely the most obviously difficult but was for me also one of the most fun and rewarding. It’s best to never be satisfied and keep pressing forward.

How is the metal scene out in Denver these days? JJ: The Denver scene when we were coming up in the 2010s was incredible, right up until the pandemic. You could see a slate of world-class bands in small
clubs every night of the week. It was ordinary to split competing bills across the street or up the block. Those bands, like us, our peers, are still basically here, but I’m not sure that we’re at the critical mass that we were before.

Denver has a lot of doom and some thrash and black metal. We’re not necessarily in the middle of it, but we can play with the various contingents that are here. I think of us being a little like the capybaras of Denver metal. We’re chill with anyone.

MC: It’s amazing! Haakon and I started playing in the metal scene here in 2004 as youngsters. It was healthy all those years ago but has blossomed into the thriving entity that we see today. There’s no shortage of talent, demand and variety. I consider myself very fortunate to be able to play metal here.

What do you think makes your band special or different?

JJ: We don’t want to be that cliche about, “well, it’s hard to define our sound,” but we do think consciously about how to be unique, how to move the art form forward.

There’s very little value in playing something that another band can play. I don’t mean from a technical standpoint, although that’s part of it. What makes you unique is your imagination. I don’t remember who originated the quote, but “the important thing is not to do what’s never been done, but to see something new in the thing that occurs every day.”

To that end, we embrace the center, the things common to all subgenres of metal. We manipulate them in ways that subgenre “purists,” the people pursuing the edges would rarely do. We’re a metal band, and metal is enough. Metal has a fifty-year history of artistic development. That puts it on equal footing with the great artistic movements of the world. Plainchant only had 400 years. I want metal to be the dominant body of music in the history of the world.

In addition to stylistic obscurity, metal also has a problem of sonic obscurity. Abundance of distortion, reverb, effects, samples, ugly mixes. People find ways to make it hard to understand what they’re doing in their music. There’s a place for that to be sure, but we embrace clarity. We want people to be able to appreciate and engage with what we actually did. We’re a competent band, but not necessarily a technical band. We want people to understand our imagination, our ideas. We intend them to be approachable to everyone, and challenging to anyone who thinks of metal in an orthodox or static way. We want no illusions about forcing listeners to consider what we’ve done, in the form of music that is fun to listen to.

The last thing that I’ll mention is that all four members of Necropanther are composers. That’s uncommon in metal bands. There are a lot of good bands with a leader and a supporting cast. Nothing against that, everyone’s good faith efforts in art are valid and valuable. However, in Necropanther, on this record and any other, all four of us have songs, riffs, and melodies that we wrote separately, which ended up as highlights. We each pressed our thumbprints into the work of our bandmates. The work is better and more unique for that input and for that process. I’m not that interested in my own thoughts in a vacuum. I want to hear what my bandmates will do with them. That’s what excites me and why I’m in this band.

Paul Anop: I think it’s also important that we all don’t like the same music. We all love metal, and that’s what drew us together, but we all have very different tastes when it comes to listening to music. I think that having a wider appreciation for music opens up our minds to exploring different possibilities. Sometimes it’s hard for us to all agree on something, but I think that keeps our art from getting stale.
I think our diversity, our attitude and our process set us a bit apart. We all enjoy different things (musically and otherwise) but drive to embrace those varied tastes and incorporate them all into the sum of our parts.

We create in a strictly democratic, egalitarian way. The beauty to me in our process is the lack of ego and what results from the members having their own opportunity to mold material from another member. Betrayal is likely our most fully realized album utilizing this process. I love working with these dudes, our unique inputs keep making us better as a whole.

At the end of the day, we are a very close group having a lot of fun doing what makes us happy. To me, that is an asset that can never be faked and is kind of the expanded goal beyond music. May this album bring connection, community, happiness and goddamn fun.

I've always been intrigued to learn about scuba diving, especially because I'm very knowledgeable about fish and other sea creatures. What are some difficulties one experiences in getting certified as a scuba diver? What are some of the unexpected joys of doing so? PA: There is nothing on earth you can do that is like scuba diving. It is a new challenge for anyone who decides to take the course. You learn about physics and physiology involving pressurized gas and depth, decompression models, and lots of other stuff you never knew about.

I think the biggest hurdle to overcome is to be as comfortable underwater as you are on the surface. The best way to achieve that level of comfort is repetitive diving. Just keep doing it and it will eventually click. I have found that the younger the student is, the quicker they are comfortable underwater. I think that may be from the lack of responsibilities or stress. They seem to also not have the same fears that adults have. I always really enjoyed teaching younger students.

Please discuss some of the remarkable things you’ve experienced in the ocean. PA: Shark schools and manta cleaning stations in Palau. All kinds of macro critters in Bali. Eagle rays and hammerheads in the Caribbean. I could go on for hours. I do have one magical story to share.

I was working as a dive guide in Grand Cayman. We had a group of regulars from the Bronx that would come down for three weeks two times a year. I didn’t even have to guide them. They were very experienced and liked to explore on their own. The very last day of one of their trips they asked me to put them on a hammerhead. They had never seen one and really wanted me to find them one. This is like finding a needle in a haystack. Maybe harder. You just have to be lucky and they knew this. I told them I would do my best.

I moored up to a site where I have seen hammerheads before. I got them in the water and told them I would meet them off the wall. When I descended past them at 100 feet they didn’t even see me because I was behind...
them. I went down until I felt a cold thermocline. I stopped, looked at my depth gauge and it read 145 feet. As soon as I looked to my left, out of the murky darkness a hammerhead was swimming straight at me! I did my best to herd it up the wall right towards the group of divers. All along banging on my tank like a madman to get their attention. The shark swam right up to all of them and they all got the experience of a close encounter with a hammerhead. That definitely made me feel like a sea god.

**What types of goals does the band have for this album and the immediate future of Necropanther?**

**PA:** We would like to get out on the road more. Playing some festivals would be really fun. We also have a music video shoot on the horizon so be on the lookout for that. It will be our first one so it will be a new experience.

**MC:** I think we’re trying to play as much as we can and play as broadly as we can. Haakon has some video projects he’s been working on as well that are exciting and new for us.

**Any final comments?**

**JJ:** Thanks for having us. We make some pretty slick-sounding records now and again, but we are a DIY band at heart and in how we operate. We don’t have a label. We produce this stuff ourselves. For anyone out there, you can do it yourself. Start making music, make it as well as you can, make a lot of it, work on your skills, and cultivate the relationships that will help you to achieve your goals. Help your friends to do it.

Famous bands and rock stars aren’t any different than the rest of us, and the real rewards for making music aren’t in any fame, accolades, or money that may or may not follow. If you love heavy music, make more of it. Give people a reason to go out on a Saturday night. Make something original and fun that will push the art form forward.

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**HEAVY METAL PUNK ROCK DARK MUSIC EXTREME SOUND**

[https://linktr.ee/morbidandmiserable](https://linktr.ee/morbidandmiserable)
Air Raid: Fatal Encounter - Swedish old school metallers (damn that’s an eighties logo) return with a new rhythm section and their first full length since 2017’s Across the Line. As expected you get straight ahead, song oriented metal. “Let the Kingdom Burn” is the best song on Fatal Encounter, as it’s a little more dynamic than their usual songs. Air Raid are just fine is you like your eighties traditional metal, but there’s nothing great or new to the genre here. Only guitarist Andreas Johansson remains from the original line-up.  High Roller

Anachronism: Meanders - This album is phenomenal. I was unfamiliar with Anachronism and didn’t realize they had two previous albums. Meanders is technical death metal at its best. This might be an album memorable and impressive enough to rival Cynic’s Focus. Lisa Voisard uses a typical death metal growler, but the music is incredible. Most of the songs are short, but they do pack in a lot of melody and intricacy. Weird angular riffs dominate the album. Meanders is technical, progressive and creative. As expected, the guitar solos are intricate, but never excessive. Definitely a very early contender for technical death metal album of the year. Unorthodox Emanations

Anatomy Of Habit: Black Openings - American indefinable rockers Anatomy Of Habit are back with their fourth full length. There are only three song on Black Openings, and as expected their long and involved. I’m not the biggest fan of the clean singing here, the vocalist does better with the less melodic music. There’s some psychedelic weirdness creeping into their sound, and they will get mellow and adventurous. Perhaps the most obvious comparison to Anatomy Of Habit’s sound would be later career Neurosis, although that may really be a vague characterization.

And Oceans: As in Graves So in Tombs - This is And Oceans second full length since reforming in 2017. Original members and guitarists Teemu Saari and T are joined by new members for 2000’s Cosmic World Mother and this follow up. Like that predecessor, this album harkens back to their early days as a melodic symphonic black metal band and doesn’t delve into the electronics found on 2000’s Amgod and 2002’s Cypher and the Havoc Unit album. Most of this album is blasting, yet melodic black metal. “Cloud Heads” has a trippy middle, but there isn’t as much variety or originality as previous albums. There’s an underlying sense of exotic with And Oceans that’s always been present, and it’s still there, this is a solid symphonic/melodic black metal album, but I feel like And Oceans are really capable of creating something even more special.  Season Of Mist

Aphotic: Abyss Gazer - I’ve heard of stargazers (even had one once in my saltwater tank) but an Abyss Gazer sounds dark. This is the debut from Italy’s Aphotic. Vocally, Aphotic are one dimensional old school death doom in style. The music has some dynamics to it, and effectively switches between old school death metal and brutal doom. “Deathward and Beyond” and the haunting “Abyssgazer” are death metal in style, while “Depths Call Depths” is classic early nineties doom. I know this may sound dated, but Aphotic sounds like they recorded this right at the start of the doom death movement. Sentient Ruin

Banishment: Machine and Bone - Every since word got out that Prong’s Tommy Victor recorded some material with guitar god George Lynch, I’ve been anxiously awaiting this product. I think Tommy sings on “Right” and “Terror,” while Filter’s Robert Patrick and Godhead’s Jason Charles Miller also guest. Joining Lynch is vocalist Devik Szell and multi-instrumentalist Joe Haze. First off, I am immediately reminded of the amazing Xcarnation, a band (Kip Winger and Cenk Eroglu) that released a futuristic progressive industrial album almost twenty years ago called Grounded. This is experimental, but still song centered. Industrial metal meets melodic metal. Other references could be Shotgun Messiah’s Violent New Breed album or one a song like “Terra Nullius” a mix of Ministry and Jane’s Addiction. “The Dread” is something completely new for Lynch, although it could be a Lynch Mob song on the surface, there’s an unusual solo that mixes country with industrial. The Banishment have created a timeless (although this would’ve been huge
in 1994 when Nine Inch Nails really broke through) album of pulsating industrial metal with Lynch’s usual emphasis on catchy songs. Frontiers

Bizarrekult: Den Tapte Krigen - From Siberia to Norway, Bizarrekult mainman Roman V. has created an aptly named band for his musical vision. Den Tapte Krigen is the second full length for Bizarrekult and it contains similar remarkable artwork to the first release. Just like bands like Arcturus before, Bizarrekult are rooted in black metal, but will venture into various experimentation musically and vocally. Bizarrekult is musically much more interesting than typical black metal bands, and even vocally, there will be variation and clear vocals to complement the typical black metal screaming. There are a variety of paces throughout Den Tapte Krigen and this band never gets boring. Season Of Mist

Brii: Sem Proposito - Brii is a Brazilian one man (Ser-afim) project that is quite impressive. Sem Proposito was originally released about two years ago, but now Flowing Downward are given it a reissue. This album has two eighty minutes and twelve seconds songs. The album starts out with an intriguing keyboard pulse and then it slowly builds on top of that before going full on black metal almost seven minutes in. There’s even a psychedelic like jam in the middle of this long song. The second song, “B,” is structured in a similar manner. It all actually seems to work, although the violence is sudden once the black metal kicks in. Flowing Downward

Catacomb: When the Stars Are Right - French death metallers Catacomb have taken thirty three years to release their debut full length, and here it is- When the Stars Are Right. Original members Ben Bussy (vocals, bass) and Tony Derytke (guitars) released e.p.’s in 1993, 2001, and 2022. When the Stars Are Right is straight up death metal. Some fast (“Blind Idiot God” and “The Great Dreamer”), some mid paced (“Ser- vants of the Old Ones” and “Waiting for the Stars”). Ben’s bass playing is a standout and comes through clear on a few songs. They end the album with a cover of Morbid Angel’s “Chapel of Ghouls.” Xtreem

Cross Country Driver: The New Truth - Cross Country Driver is a trio; Rob Lamothe on vocals and guitars (Riverdogs), guitarist James Harper (Fighting Friday), and drummer Zander (Rob’s son) Lamothe, but that’s one hell of a guest list as Rob’s former bandmate Vivian Campbell (Def Leppard), Doug Pinnick (King’s X), Mike Mangini (Dream Theater, Extreme), and Greg Chaisson (Badlands) all make notable contributions to this debut album. As you would expect, this is American southern rock similar to the Riverdogs. Doug guests on the funky “A Man With No Direction.” “Just me and my guitar…” line from the acoustic “Traces of Truth” basically sums up the essence of Rob Lamothe. “Shine” is some uptempo rock, but the second half of The New Truth goes into a more acoustic, laid back, even mostly ballad territory. Much like the Riverdogs releases, there’s some real good energetic rock and roll here, but a little too much of the mellower southern style that makes my mind wander away. Frontiers

Dark Embrace: Dark Heavy Metal - Spanish metallers Dark Embrace released The Birth of Darkness in 2006 and The Call of the Wolves in 2017, both were more gothic sounding than their latest, Dark Heavy Metal. Dark Heavy Metal is a varied album. There’s some folk metal “Endless Months,” some more darker, almost death metal songs. Overall it’s not a good album and Dark Embrace sounds inconsistent at best. “This is the Rain” is the best song here, it’s melancholy, slower and more dramatic. When vocalist Oscar Rilo sings in a clear voice he reminds me of Matt Barlow from Iced Earth era, but he will combine that style with a more gravelly death metal style. Dark Embrace remind me a little of Crematory or Darkseed, so maybe those fans will like them, but there are a lot of better bands in this style. Massacre

Dawn Ray’d: To Know the Light - British trio Dawn Ray’d are back after a four year absence with their third full length, To Know the Light. Many of the songs here follow that established Dawn Ray’d formula of folksy black metal speed with a quiet middle section to break up the bombardment. The vocals and music are nothing special although the album gets
better towards the second half. “In the Shadow of the Past” is the best song here, it’s slow, almost exotic and ends with acoustic guitars. “Freedom in Retrograde” has clean vocals with acoustic guitars and the more melodic approach. The closing two songs, “Wildfire” and “Go as Free Companions” also utilize better clean vocals and mix the music with folk and viking elements dominating. To Know the Light is a mixed bag, but Dawn Ray’d continue to show potential. Pros-thetic

Demons Down: I Stand - Right away I thought of House Of Lord’s excellent 1992 album. Demons Down. Turns out three members of Demons Down have been in House Of Lords. Guitarist Jimi Bell is part of the current House Of Lords lineup while bassist Chuck Wright (Quiet Riot) and drummer Ken Mary (Flotsam And Jetsam) have spent at least one lengthy stint in that band as well. And that’s what you get- I Stand sounds like classic House Of Lords except with Chilean vocalist James Robledo (Sinner’s Blood) instead of James Christian. This is grandiose melodic metal. Typical Ken Mary powerful drumming through out. “Down in a Hole” is my favorite song here, the guitars and keyboards really shine here. There are predictable types of songs; the ballad (“On My Way to you”) or the eighties chorus (“Where Will Our Tears Fall”), but House Of Lords fans will like this. Frontiers

Diatharchy: Sentient - Italian musician Diath offers his full length solo debut and it’s an interesting endeavor. He previously played bass on an album by Sevitia a few years ago, but seems focused on Diatharchy for now. The title track kicks off the album and it’s chaotic, with powerful drums but the vocals and guitars are buried a little too much into the mix. “Memory of a Time” sounds like seventies influenced prog, “Pugacoff” starts off mellow with some harmonizing, and again, I’m impressed with that percussion. Diath goes folk metal on “Sikrigen Birken” and Rhapsody comes to mind on the nine minute “V” due to it’s Italian epic power metal sound. Sentient is quite diverse and Diath is a talented musician and songwriter, he’s someone to keep an eye on as he continues to perfect his craft.

Downfall Of Gaia: Silhouettes of Disgust - German extreme metallers Downfall Of Gaia continue their evolution with their sixth full length, Silhouettes of Disgust. “Existence of Awe” is a great opening track and sets the tone. There is a lot of speed and aggression here, but they know how to add a sense of maturity with melodious dark sections. Second track, “The Whir of Flies,” is the perfect example of this- black metal speed and vocal, but the middle of the song changes gears and goes quiet and atmospheric. “Eyes to Burning Skies” starts out mellow, then blasts away. “While Bloodsprings Become Rivers” shows Michael Kadnar’s intensity with great drumming. At times Downfall Of Gaia still mix in some dirty, sludge metal to give Silhouettes of Disgust more weight. Metal Blade

Electric Mob: 2 Make U Cry and Dance - One look at this album cover and album title and I was in no rush to listen to this promo. I was saving it until last, because I wasn’t even sure if this band played music that would fit with this magazine, and damn was I wrong. Brazil’s Electric Mob play high energy rock and roll with a blues influence. Sort of like some of those late eighties, early nineties bands like the Quireboys or Love/Hate, but with more talent and aggression. Renan Zonta is a vocalist willing to push his limits. “It’s Gonna Hurt” is just an awesome song. “Soul Stealer” and “Locked and Loaded” are heavy with a nice guitar groove. “Thy Kingdom Come” is fast paced and “Love Cage”- damn! What a killer riff. It’s always great to listen to an album with low expectations and enjoy it this much. Frontiers

Endorphins Lost: Night People - Pacific Northwesterners Endorphins Lost are considered a “hardcore/powerviolence” band, although I would just consider them grindcore. Much of the album is blastbeat fast and savage, with some slower hardcore mixed in. Like most grind bands, the lyrical message is an integral part of their existence and Endorphins Lost cover mental health and social equality, among other topics for their vitriol.
Engima Division: The Enigma Division -

Damn this album blew me away like no other this year. The Dublin trio the Enigma Division have created a progressive metal album that combines all the traditional aspects with modern sounds and some sharp djent riffing. Right away, this album sounds like it comes from the future. “The Escapist” and “Echoes in the Deep” are both tremendous songs. Heavy, technical, unlike almost anything you’ve ever heard before. The vocals are solid. “Afterglow” is a good song, but really average compared to what the Enigma Division have done on the rest of this album. “The Age of Discovery” gets them back on track with sharp syncopated guitar rhythms and a slight electronic element, the melodic vocals perfectly complimenting. “Clarity” is introspective, while epic and almost twenty minute closer, “1977 Ad Infinitum” fits a more traditional progressive metal template. With their first recorded output, the Enigma Division have set a new standard for excellency in progressive metal.

Eyes: Congratulations - One look at the band photo, band name, album title, artwork and you will have no idea what this Danish band is about. Well, they let the music do the talking for them. I guess this is post-hardcore, rock or something. No easy label here. After listening to the opening track I do think of more recent A Life Once Lost, you know, that sorta commercial but not aggressive rock style- little bit of sludge thrown in. “Tearjerker” goes on the slower and sludgy sound, while “Dull Boy” is more aggressive rock, maybe a little punk in there as well. Sometimes I think of Unsane when listening to this. It’s just quality dirty rock that meant to be played live and not on the radio. Indisciplinarian And Nefarious Industries

First Signal: Face Your Fears - Less than a year since their fourth album, Closer to the Edge, the Harry Hess (Harem Scarem) fronted First Signal is already back with a new album. Bassist Michele Guaitoli takes over the production role after Daniel Flores (Mind’s Eye drummer) handled the previous three records. As expected, the new album is song oriented and classy. “Unbreakable” is a perfect opening track and it’s a really good song. “Situation Critical” ups the heaviest while maintaining catchy vocals. “Dominoes” and “Face Your Fears” are both up tempo and only “Never Gonna Let You Go” misses the mark. Some of Harem Scarem is hit or miss, I actually find First Signal to be more consistent and even more metal sounding.

Frontiers

For I Am King: Crown - The most impressive thing about For I Am King’s third album, is the skills of the lead guitarist. I find the guitar solos are always ear grabbing throughout this album. The vocals on Crown are raw and more black metal in style, while the music is death metal, often melodic and sometimes intricate. “Pariah” is a good example of how For I Am King can create a dramatic, almost atmospheric. “Bloodline” even ventures into some djent guitar playing. This is their first album in five years and worth the wait. Even though the vocals are not, the music is sophisticated.

Redfield

Foretoken: Triumph - Virginia duo (Steve Redmond does the music, Cooley does the vocals) Foretoken are back with the follow up to their 2020 debut, Ruin. The first thought that comes to mind when listening to opening track, “Revenant of Valor,” is that the busy guitar melodies, the heavy double bass drums, and extreme vocals make me think of In Flames. The slower pace of “Serpent King’s Venom” highlights a nifty riff and the drum programming on “Devil of the Sea” is full and powerful. They close Triumph with a cover of Naglfar’s “I Am Vengeance,” and that should give you an idea of what you will hear with Foretoken. It’s a mix of death thrash but nothing new.

Prosthetic

Giant Brain: Grade a Gray Day - It’s been about fourteen years, but Giant Brain is back with a new album. Grade a Gray Day is their third album overall and their last to feature guitarist Phil Durr (Big Chief, Five Horse Johnson) who died four years ago. Like those two bands, Giant Brain sound like a band rooted in the exploratory rock of the seventies, although it is almost all an instrumental album. “Terminator” has some trippy effects that complements the jam. “Between Trains” is a sweet jam. I was distracted by the quiet psychedelic ambient “The Variac,” but Grade a Gray Day is a quality jam and even reminds me a little of latter day Karma To Burn. Small Stone
Gorod: The Orb - Technical/progressive death metal bands always seem to get the cult following and endless acclaim, but not many of them release albums regularly. France’s Gorod is that rare exception. With a line-up that’s been in tact for nearly ten years, The Orb is their seventh full length. As usual, they give the listener a perfect mix of technical skills and brutal death metal- with opener “Thrematheism” setting the table. A Gorod album is not complete without a few highlights and a surprise or two. The vocals on “The Orb” are almost clear, and the vocals on closer “Strange Days” are trippy and clean. You’ve got the trademark fast and tight drumming (“Scale of Sorrows”) and the stop and go repetitiveness (“Savitri”). They are the best technical death metal band, but they are the most consistent.

Gunter Werno: Anima One - Progressive metal fans are well aware of keyboardist Gunter Werno and his resume. Best known for his work with Vanden Plas, Werno has also recorded with Place Vendome, D.C. Cooper, and Sunstorm. Anima One is not your typical solo album. This is a four part symphonic journey and joining him is the Pfalzphilharmonie Kaiserslautern Orchestra and his Vanden Plas bandmates. It’s almost exclusively an instrumental album and feels like you’re witnessing, aurally anyway, an extravagant play. This is not for the metal crowd, but it does show Gunter Werno’s talent and Frontiers was willing to take the chance to release and promote it. Frontiers

Haliphron: Prey - Denmark’s Haliphron is a band new band but they have some veteran musicians; their drummer is in God Dethroned and the vocalist and the guitarist were originally in Izegrim. Keyboardist David Gutierrez Rojas plays a big role in Haliphron’s sound. The musical style is black and death metal, but keyboards a major part of the band. Listening to Prey I am instantly reminded of those classic death/doom bands from the nineties like Nightfall and On Thorns I Lay. There’s even an occasional theatrical sound that instantly recalls Misanthrope. Listenable

Hollentor: Divergency - Hollentor is the solo project of Floridian guitarist Glen Poland. Glen’s has an impressive group of guest musicians on his albums- including the Drovers (Glen and Shaw), George Lynch, Rudy Sarzo, Henning Basse, Ripper Owens, and others. This is a quick follow up to last year’s sophomore album, Escaping Myself. There aren’t any stand out tracks, but it’s all solid traditional metal. The songs are short and written without flair or experimentation. I don’t have any obviously comparisons, although I thought of Dokken while listening to “Judgement Day.” Glen Poland has put together another all star cast.

I Am: Eternal Steel - Dallas extreme metallers are back with their third album, and their first since 2018’s Hard to Kill. Their sound continues to evolve but not stray too far from their metalcore/death/thrash roots. The vocals are definitely in that death metal vein, but the music is more varied. Musically it’s more interesting than the vocals, although the whispered vocals on “Heaven on Earth” have appeal, as does the deliberately paced “The Iron Gate.” If you’re a fan of this genre, I Am delivers a quality product, if you’re not a fan of this genre, I don’t think this is the album to win you over.

Infinite And Divine: Ascendancy - Swedish duo (Tezzi Persson- vocals and Jan Akesson- music) are Infinite And Divine. Ascendancy is their follow up to the 2021 debut Silver Lining. This is song oriented, melodic rock album. It’s harmless and nothing really stands out- well, except maybe “Silent Revolution” and its great guitar riff, but it’s buried in the mix. Infinite And Divine sound like a band that would’ve had a great career in the early eighties. Persson’s vocals are just fine, but they don’t stand out from the pack of female vocalists in the past forty years. Frontiers

In Flames: Foregone - I know I’m in the minority, but my favorite In Flames album was always 2002’s Reroute to Remain. The modern metal with subtle electronic elements, is the style that I most enjoy from the band. If you do prefer the classic In Flames sound, you now have the Halo Effect- a band which actually has more members from In Flames (all of them) compared to this incarnation of the band. Only vocalist Anders Friden and guitarist Bjorn Gelotte are long time members. The first proper song, “State of Slow Decay,” is that old school In Flames style- the speed, intricate guitar melodies and razor vocals. The rest of the album
is in the more modern In Flames style. Slower songs, but heavy on the groove with some complementing electronics. “Pure Light of Mind” is an unusual song for In Flames as it is a full on ballad, and Anders’ vocal style on “Cynosure” is an alternative, clear style we haven’t heard from him before. This is my favorite album by them in over twenty years, but I think old school In Flames fans would be better served by the Halo Effect. Nuclear Blast

Khymera: Hold Your Ground - Khymera is basically a solo vehicle for bassist (and keyboardist and vocalist here) Dennis Ward (Pink Cream 69, Place Vendome, Unisonic). This is their fifth album and a quick, for them, follow up to 2020’s Master of Illusions. As expected from a Dennis Ward project, this is melodic metal/rock. It does remind me of early Sinner (speaking of singing bassists), Bon Jovi (second album), and Pink Cream 69. “Our Love is Killing Me” is the required ballad, “Believe in What You Want” is such an eighties cliche. Khymera is what it is, predictable, safe melodic metal inspired by the eighties. Frontiers

Kuntsquad: Kuntsquad - Kuntsquad is a four piece death metal/crust band from Australia. This is their debut full length after a couple of singles and an e.p. There are fourteen songs and about half an hour worth of music. Kuntsquad are more death metal and rarely play at a grinding speed, I guess that’s where the crust description comes into play. The songs are short and direct, nothing special, nothing memorable. The only two songs that really stand out are “Sit Down” and “Stomp” thanks to their heaviness and memorable riffing and “Psycho Killer” plays off as a cool anthem and “Out Alive” will have you nodding your head with approval. Maybe you could call this death metal with a punk attitude. Wormholedeath

Majesties: Vast Reaches Unclaimed - United States melodic death thrashers Majesties is the formation of members from two bands who have already established themselves with three full lengths between them; Tanner from Osequiae and Carl and Matthew from Inexorum. Majesties’ sound recalls the 90’s Swedish death metal scene and features lots of lead guitar playing and vocals that are a cross between black and death metal, but lean toward the later. The acoustic passage on “Path to Neverwhen” helps break up the aggression, as does some of the melodic sections towards the end of “Sidereal Spire.” Majesties are able to capture that 90’s death thrash glory, but nothing new to the genre. 20 Buck Spin

Mortuous: Upon Desolation - Here comes Mortuous’ long awaited follow up to their 2018 debut, Through Wilderness. This California quartet feature veteran members of the death metal scene and there’s some good stuff here. One of the best things about this album are the guitar solos. Other bright spots are the sorrowful doom death of “Nothing,” the Scandinavian death metal of “Burning Still,” and the epic, sometimes melodic “Ash and Dismay.” Upon Desolation is just a solid death metal album, no more, no less. Carbonized

Morwinyon: Wastelands - Morwinyon is an atmospheric black metal duo (Matteo Guarnello on vocals, keyboards, drums and Lorenzo Pompili on guitars and bass) from Italy. They formed their alliance in 2019 and released an impressive debut, Pristine, in 2021. Wastelands is the appropriate follow up. The ten and a half minute “Devouring Flames” opens the album and sets the tone for the next three songs- fast paced black metal with melodic keys dominating, giving Morwinyon a symphonic black metal sound. The vocals remain extreme and the songs are long, except for the keyboard orchestrated final track, “Quiesence.” Naturmacht

Motive Black: Auburn - Motive Black is a new band formed by vocalist Elana Justin after her move from New York to Los Angeles. Butcher Babies’ Carley Harvey and P.O.D.’s Marcos Curiel join as guest on the first two songs and Korn/ David Lee Roth/ KXM drummer Ray Luzier guests on half the tracks. Auburn is a weird album because some of these songs are great, and some are forgettable. Ray makes his presence felt on most of his tracks. The middle of the album; “Purge,” “Cellophane,” and “Bad Decisions” are the best songs here. High energy, grooves, heaviness and speed all play a role in those songs. But other songs like “Broken” and “Bloodsport” are boring and don’t capture the same energy. Even though Ray and some veteran musicians are involved in this album, it is only Motive Black’s debut and they will likely to deliver a more focused album next time. There are some good tracks here, but not enough. AFM
Necropanther: *Betrayal* - Necropanther are a Denver based band that plays a mix of thrash and melodic death metal. “One and Only” kicks off the album and I am reminded of old school Kreator. The rhythm section spent two years with thrashers Havok and the guitar solos and drumming are two highlights, and especially on “Furies.” “Breathe Evil” stretches the vocals into a more black metal style. *Betrayal* is a decent album, there is a raw enthusiasm to what Necropanther are creating.

Nervochaos: *Chthonic Wrath* - Brazilian death metallers Nervochaos have been playing this style of death metal for almost thirty years now. They’ve been even prolific in recent years (this is their fourth album in five years), only drummer Eduardo Lane remains from the early days. They’re still playing that straight ahead old school death metal style. You would think they would be more advanced after all these years. “Avantgarde” doesn’t live up to its name, but at least there’s a cool solo in the beginning, and “Ouroboros” is the best song on *Chthonic Wrath*. You should know by now if Nervochaos is a band for you or not.

Emanzipation

Nothingness: *Supraliminal* - Nothingness is a death metal band from Minnesota and this is the follow up to the 2019 debut, *The Hollow Gaze of Death*. The logo and artwork makes you think this will be goregrind. Overall this is a solid album. I find when Nothingness slows the pace for some doom influences to creep (“Curse of Creation” and “Festering Abstraction”) they become a more interesting band. Despite appearances, Nothingness are less goregrind and more underground death metal. Everlasting Spew

Nuclear Holocaust: *Sailing the Seas of Nuclear Waste* - This album was recorded in one day and it shows. The bass sounds like the strings are made of rubber bands and the album lacks diversity. Obviously this is a thrash band with a sense of humor (and maybe Primus fans). *Sailing the Seas of Nuclear Waste* is the third full length and first in five years for this Polish band. This is messy, raw thrash with vocals that are more death metal in style. I do feel like Nuclear Holocaust would benefit from having longer songs and more mosh parts. Selfmadegod

Oak Pantheon: *The Absence* - Damn this album is good. “Becoming None” had me intrigued from the start. The first half of the song is just acoustic guitar strumming and it was interesting and made me wonder what Oak Pantheon is all about. After a few minutes there is an effective mix of clear and aggressive vocals. The second song, “Listen,” is a little more traditional for a metal band. The music is dense and busy, there’s even a killer precision thrash riff. The vocals are excellent and it turns out to be an exceptional anthem- “we’ve had enough- just listen!” There’s a lot of variety on *The Absence*. “Dissociate” sounds like a Johnny Cash song”Bard of the Hell Bent Angels” is folk metal with a dose of Pink Floyd. This is a band talented and diverse enough to appeal to fans of mid-career Opeth or any era of Agalloch.

Obelyskkh: *The Ultimate Grace of God* - German trio Obelyskkh are back with their long awaited fifth album. *The Ultimate Grace of God* is worth the wait as Obelyskkh have recorded a meandering and creative album that doesn’t fall neatly into any category. There’s some doom, psychedelic, and even punk going on in most of these songs. “Dog Headed God” is quirky not unlike mid-career Voivod. There’s also a hypnotic quality to these songs as sounds are repeated and slowly build upon each other. Almost seventeen minute closer “Sat Nam” plays out like a cinematic soundtrack. As unique as their band name and album artwork, you can’t call Obelyskkh boring. Exile On Mainstream

Phal-Angst: *Whiteout* - Vienna’s Phal-Angst are back with their fifth album. This is not the easiest release to describe, maybe the more experimental Killing Joke? “Whiteout” starts out with just keyboards, the song remains calm, although with rough vocal style. “Severence” has an industrial pulse beat, but is also calm and haunting. “Least Said Soonest Mended” continues to trend of slow build up, but I keep waiting for Phal-Angst to break out, but they never do. “Unhinged” builds up into an industrial sound, but doesn’t live up to the song’s title. I don't know, parts of Whiteout are interesting, but I keep waiting for something more to happen. Noise Appeal
Phantom Elite: Blue Blood - Phantom Elite is a trio of musicians creating a modern metal sound with the female vocals of Marina La Torraca. They have two prior full lengths (2018’s Wasteland and 2021’s Titanium) and Blue Blood sees them continue their evolution. The first half of the album is the best. “Skin of My Teeth” opens Blue Blood and set the tone with heavy modern metal with occasional vocal effects. “Apex” and “Fragments” are two other songs that effectively utilize modern metal, but it’s not djent or industrial. The second half is just not as exciting and there are a few too many mellow songs. Consistency has been the biggest problem with Phantom Elite so far. They have a few really good songs on each album, but like a team winning by twenty points at halftime, they blow the lead with their second half. Frontiers

Phallic Bearer: Summoning Apocalyptic Devastation - This is the debut full length for Phallic Bearer but you may recognized vocalist/bassist Herb Burke and guitarist Kelly Kuciemba from death metallers Drawn And Quartered. Similar to the partner band, Phallic Bearer play an effective and dense mix of death black and thrash metal. Kuciemba’s renowned lead guitar skills are on display here as well. “Defiled by Sodomy” has some cool riffs before and after the guitar solo with thundering drums throughout. “Rise of the Goat” makes rare use of the flange sound in extreme metal, but it really works well here. Phallic Bearer are in the same territory as Drawn And Quartered, albeit a little more black metal in imagery and lyrics, but you’re still getting the quality extreme metal you would expect from these guys. Nameless Grave

Redlight King: In Our Blood - This is the Canadian rockers fourth full length and it’s quite impressive. Right away, “Cold Killer” kicks the album off with a distinct rock and roll energy, it’s even the type of song you would hear in an action scene for a movie. You can hear that Redlight King is not a generic band they have an individual identity. There are occasional vocal effects (“King Again” and “Paid Off”) that also make this album more distinct. “Evil Lie” has some fuzzy guitar and only “Heavy Heart” comes across as a song worthy of skipping. Redlight King demand your attention and have created a unique album most people will enjoy. AFM

Remorseful: Our Law Grace - Massachussetts’s extreme metallers Remorseful are back with their second album. This is one of the better albums I’ve encountered in extreme metal as of late. The vocals are inhuman and slightly distorted- but ultimately just that one style, while the music delivers some diversity. The slow paced, almost industrial pounding of “Audition” and “Two Masks” contrast well with the varied speeds of songs like “Dull Pattern.” They’re colder than Anaal Nathrakh, but more brutal than Godflesh, but if you like those bands, you should check this out.

Replica: Sangre de Maquinas - Argentina’s Replica offer their debut full length sounds a lot like the the better power metal bands from the nineties. There’s some groove metal, but it’s definitely not nu metal. Juan Cruz Corsich has some good range. “Dolor Intenso” and “Dolor Interior” recalls those early nineties critically acclaimed bands like Mordred and Ignorance (The Confident Rat). Replica is one of the bands I discovered by going through new releases on Bandcamp, I’m glad I took the time to listen and hope some potential fans give them a shot.

Rezn: Solace - This album I really dig. This band turned out to be another surprise. Solace is their fourth full length and after checking out those albums, you can hear the progression. “Altered by Feverish Visions” kicks off Solace and it’s a moody instrumental and good tone setting for what’s to come. The second song, “Possession,” is where Rezn really excels. Heavy music, but just a haunting, dark song that defies categorization. “Stasis” is another heavy song, both vocals and music are excellent. “Webbed Roots” has some surprise saxophone. Solace contains six long songs, but they are always interesting. I know this fits under that psychedelic stoner doom metal tag, but Rezn are much more than that.

Rigor Sardonicous: Praeparet Bellum - This is Long Island’s Rigor Sardonicous’ seventh album and first since 2012’s Ego Diligio Vos. Not much has changed with their style of slow paced death doom since the duo of Glenn Hampton and Joseph Fogarazzo (ex-Forgotten, Dimentianon) formed the band thirty three years ago. Even the logo and artwork reflects the dark simplicity of Rigor Sardonicous. The songs
varied in length but the sound doesn’t stray from the slow, brutal pace. Momentum Mori

Runemagick: Beyond the Cenotaph of Mankind - When Sweden’s Runemagick came back with a new full length in 2018, I was so happy to see this doom death institution return. Starting in 1997, Runemagick released an album a year until 2006. Each one built on the other but they always (and still do) retained that old school doom death style. Even though they stick exclusively to this style, they do a good job of changing the pace and giving each song its own identity. There’s something comforting about knowing a quality band is going to deliver a product and you know what to expect. Hammerheart

Sandrider: Enveletration - Seattle trio Sandrider (two members from Akimbo) have been around a few years and this is their fourth album so far. What we get is high energy and sometimes dirty rock and roll. First song and first single “Alia” sets the tone and they actually rip off a famous Led Zeppelin riff at the end of the song for punctuation. Sandrider a lot heavier than your typical stoner rock bands. The title track and its repetitive groove is something Unsane would have been proud of. Sometimes you’ll hear a little Quicksand (“Circles”) and a Smashing Pumpkins like riff (“Weasel”) but Sandrider is coming up with some energetic and heavy, grooving, dirty rock and roll. Satanic Royalty

Seventh Crystal: Wonderland - Swedish rockers Seventh Crystal first appeared with their debut, 2021’s Delirium. Led by Perpetual Etude vocalist Kristian Fyher, Seventh Crystal are highlighted by solid vocals and melodic metal style. Some of the highlights include “Hollow,” the uptempo “Next Generation,” and “Higher Ground” with keyboards (reminds me of Bruce Hornsby from the eighties) perfectly complement the melodic rock. Some of Wonderland is predictable eighties style (“Million Times”) and two ballads in a row (“My Own Way” and “Imperfect”), so it’s an inconsistent album overall. Frontiers

Somnambula: Estasis Interrumpida - Spanish death metallers Somnambula are back with their long awaited third album. Following their Obituary inspired cover e.p., Infected, comes Estasis Interrumpida. This is death metal with a slight doom influence, sort of like Incantation, but sometimes they have a flair for the exotic. “Agua de Ruina” is an example, with its dark vibe and esoteric samples. Xtreme

Straight Hate: Slaves of Falseness - Polish death thrashers Straight Hate return with their third full length. Straight Hate has been around since 2008 and I am immediately reminded of Discharge with their style that mixes death, thrash, and grind. Of course, I also think of the Sepultura song, but this is much more extreme. The buzzsaw speed of “Cursed” actually recalls Ministry’s “T.V. II,” in sound and speed. There’s also some songs reminiscent of later era Entombed- “Infester” and “Stalker”- especially at the end. “The Curtain Has Fallen” has some drum and bass groove, but Straight Hate turns on the speed. Slaves of Falseness is a fast, crusty album, but it’s varied just enough to keep you listening. Selfmadgod

Street Tombs: Reclusive Decay - After a few demos, New Mexico’s Street Tombs offer their full length debut. Like the cover artwork, this is primitive sounding death metal. Reclusive Decay is basically just the same speed from one song to the other and the vocals are generic death metal. The music is just boring and really doesn’t inspire much interest. This is the same label that released the solid Mortuous album. Carbonized

T3nors: Naked Soul - No, this is a new album with Ripper Owens, Harry Conklin, and Sean Peck (a.k.a. the Three Tremors), this is the adult oriented rock version of the same idea. The three singers in this case of Swedish vocalist Kent Hilli (Perfect Plan, Giant) and American vocalists Robbie LaBlanc (Blanc Faces) and Toby Hitchcock (Pride Of Lions). As expected, it’s a classy album, the vocalists are solid- nothing great, nothing embarrassing. Surprisingly, it’s mostly an upbeat rock album, no real ballads, and more song oriented than one might expect. Frontiers

Thron: Dust - The fourth album of Germany’s Thron is upon us and the first thing I commend them on is that, despite the aggressive vocal style, you can understand all the lyrics clearly. Sometimes Thron reminds me of the beginnings of the Swedish melodic death thrash scene when Soilwork and Dark Tranquility
reigned supreme. “The True Belief” takes things in a more melodic, though still extreme. “The Golden Calf,” “The Face of Extreme,” and almost seven minute closer, “Martyr,” all have interesting melodic elements, even with a guitar tone that reminds me of Immortal. A solid, well done release. **Listenable**

**Treedeon: New World Hoarder** - German doom metallers Treedeon are back with their third full length, *New World Hoarder*. This album had me hooked from the start. “Nutcreme Superspreader” kicks off the album and even though it doesn’t directly compare to “Black Sabbath,” like that opening track on the legend’s debut album, “Nutcreme Superspreader” is a unique, mood setting opening track that does not represent the primary musical style of Treedeon. When you hear the line “this insanity…” Treedeon sounds authentic. “Omega Time Bomb” follows and it’s another great track, with perfect vocal style for this type of music. “New World Hoarder” has a hypnotic groove with psychedelic vocals. By the last song, “Laderlappen,” finishes the album with a more stoner rock sound. This is a great album, and a must listen to stoner rock/sludge/doom fans. **Exile On Mainstream**

**Trha: Vat Gelenva** - This is one of four albums released by American black metal solo artist Thet Alef (his name is a lot longer) in 2022. Flowing Downward is releasing *Vat Gelenva* properly here in early 2023. All five of these songs are over twelve minutes long, but they don’t seem too long. There’s a buzzsaw guitar and some death metal riffs. Sometimes Trha will go to only keyboards in the middle. Most of *Vat Gelenva* is black metal, but there are plenty of melody, keyboards, and some interesting guitar playing. Trha is a high prolific project and hopefully a spotlight on *Vat Gelenva* will get it some worthy attention. **Flowing Downward**

**Tribunal: The Weight of Remembrance** - Canadian duo Soren Mourne (vocals, bass, cello) and Etienne Flinn (vocals, guitars) are Tribunal, a death doom band with, *The Weight of Remembrance*, their full length debut. Most of the album is slowly paced and heavy. “Initiation” uses death metal growls with some female singing. The female vocals are haunting and add an extra vibe to the album. There’s a good balance of the two styles on this album. “The Path” closes *The Weight of Remembrance* with sadness and more slow paced doom. This is a good album for people who long for the doom death of the nineties. **20 Buck Spin**

**Uranium: An Exacting Punishment** - This is really cool. I mentioned this in the *Hold Me Down* review, I felt extreme music and industrial would be the perfect match for new and largely unexplored territory. Uranium is even more intense. The drums and percussion most dominant on *An Exacting Punishment*. If Godflesh was more brutal, this is what they would have sounded like “Gnawing at the Bones” is an appropriately noisy song, but the prevailing sound here is brutal, cold, and devastating-just what industrial metal is supposed to be. **Sentient Ruin**

**Vanishment: Forced Compliance** - Seattle’s Vanishment play a straight ahead eighties inspired brand of heavy metal. The band is new to the scene, but features members of Lair Of Minotaur (drummer Chris Wozniak) and Himsa (guitarist Brian Johnson). Forced Compliance (hmm.. Covid and vaccine mandate nonsense?) takes inspiration from bands like Iron Maiden, Metallica, Judas Priest, etc- they don’t sound exactly like any of them, but you get the idea of what they’re doing here. Vocalist Rob Ropkins (Stricken) uses more of a shouting style than singing. I feel like the title track is the best song here, but it’s a solid, straight forward metal album that defies time.

**Vittra: Blasphemy Blues** - It’s no surprise to find out that Vittra come from Sweden. They are a new band and this is their debut, but they have mastered the classic nineties Swedish death metal sound. You have the melodic death metal, technical riffing, and aggressive vocals- all the trademarks. Want some At The Gates like acoustic intro- “Satmara” has it. There’s also an album Amon Amarth meets thrash and eighties heavy metal vibe here. “Lykantropi” has excellent guitar work on the riffs and solos. “Sommarfodd” also has a great solo and a head nodding groove. Vittra break no new ground here at all, but they do bring back that early nineties At The Gates sound.
**Wig Wam: Out of the Dark** - During their initial run from 2001 to 2014, Norwegian glam rocking metallers Wig Wam released four acclaimed albums and developed a following, although they never really broke through. One of their songs made it onto an H.B.O. show and they came back with *Never Say Die* in 2021 and *Out of the Dark* is coming out this year. This is classic Wig Wam. “High and Dry” and “Ghosting You” are catchy songs, “Out of the Dark” kicks off with an energized groove riff, “The American Dream” sounds like it could’ve come off *Slave to the Grind*, “79” is a quality instrumental. Some songs are forgettable; “Forevermore” and “Bad Luck Chuck,” or the blah-llad “The Purpose.” It’s a good album and safe to say that Wig Wam is back. **Frontiers**

**Wounds Of Recollection: Warm Glow of the End of Everything** - The solo project of Georgia’s Annos continues with this tenth installment. *Wounds Of Recollection* was started when he was a young teenager and the growth of the band has been remarkable. Each album gets better, more intricate, and more emotionally complex- and this latest, *Warm Glow of the End of Everything*, is no exception. The music is often fast, noisy and with black metal screaming vocals, but there is also an equal amount of intricate, melodic, post-black metal passages and some occasional soft vocals. Most of these songs have a dramatic edge to them. “Everyone is Somewhere Else” crosses over into doom metal with its downtrodden sound and some clean vocals at the end. Most of this album contains songs that are over nine minutes long, but they have so much diversity, feeling, and depth, they never seem long, never get boring. Annos has really mastered his craft and it will be interesting to see how *Wounds Of Recollection* continues to evolve. **Trepanation**

**Yskelgroth: Bleeding of the Hideous** - Thirteen years since their debut, *Unholy Primitive Nihilism*, the trio of vocalist Dave Rotten (*Avulsed*), guitarist/ bassist Vicente Paya (*Bisonte*), and drummer Nexus 6 are back with a new full length, *Bleeding of the Hideous*. Much of this album is fast paced blackened death metal. Yskelgroth do a good job creating chaos, but I feel they work best when they slow the pace on “Omnidirectional End” and allow for the guitar playing to get innovative and have some varied extreme vocals. **Xtreem**
California stoner doom rockers Owl bring their love of the seventies and their sense of humor for this family affair interview. Their third album, Geomancy, is out now and rockers need to check them out and enjoy the vibes. For your reference:

AKB: Alexander (AK); guitar, vox
CAB: Axell; guitar, vox
CZB: Clint; drums
MS: Magic; bass

Geomancy is coming out in three days- what are your thoughts on the album, the recording, the time it took to get this one out there? AKB: It was a hell of a long time between album releases. Screech was released in the dying light of 2014, so it’s been over eight years. It’s still less than Danava though.

MS: Yeah but it’s only Owl’s third album, Danava has four.

AKB: They don’t have four yet. We’ll be tied with Danava for like a month, and then their fourth album will come out in April. But we’ll still be tied with Lecherous.

CAB: Geomancy sounds great. We fucking nailed it! It’s our proggiest, our craziest, and probably our heaviest album so far. And it’s an hour long.

AKB: We stretched out. Artistically, and also on the therapeutic couch. We spoke with our inner childs and realized they were the devil.

MS: Pffft.

CZB: Geomancy is the single most excruciatingly time consuming artistic project I have ever been involved in. But it was worth every minute.

I thought Screech was an excellent album and really showed the band’s potential from the debut coming to fruition- do you feel Geomancy is another big step into the true soul of Owl? CAB: Thanks Transcending. Screech was the first album that sounds like us as a band. We wrote the Screech songs together and they got Owlified over time. The first album is like a glorified demo of Axell and Alex songs. Geomancy is the sound of us refining our creative process.

CZB: Every step of Owl is something different. We never set out to be a “proto metal” band or anything else. Owl is the product of what the Baechle brothers decided to do at any given time. The next album could be a hip hop funk project. Who knows?

CAB: Geomancy is the album we’ve been wanting to make. It combines all our dissonance and sweetness with our most ambitious songwriting.

MS: I didn’t play on Screech. So I don’t have a dog in this rooster fight.

Your logo, your image, your artwork, your sound, your songs- this all screams 1976- to steal a famous St. Vitus album, do you think you guys were born too late or do you think this Owl creation is time-less and can be enjoyed by any generation of metal (music) fan? AKB: Funny you should say 1976. Isn’t that like Boston and Hotel California? What are you trying to say, bro? That we’re not punk?

CAB: We’re more into 1971, but there’s a lot of influence from all over rock and roll history. Saying we were born too late is a cop-out, those years seem cool in retrospect because of the albums those bands had the guts to make. St. Vitus, Witchfinder General – Gits, the Pretty Things. A lot of the bands we like were never huge. They had to grind it out. So if we have to do the same thing, time is just- like a continuum, man.

CZB: We all like to borrow from the past, as children, we were turned on to our father’s music: Led Zeppelin, Grateful Dead, Yes. Flipping through those records in Dad’s collection, and seeing the otherworldly imagery, that WAS rock to us, that was magic! It was ROCK as a vehicle to elevate to a higher realm beyond the mundane. And if we can even approach the effect that those old 70s records had on us, even 10% of that magic, then I’ll be happy with that!

AKB: I think our music is largely inaccessible. Our vocals are not appealing, it’s not danceable, fun factor is marginal at best. It’s pure intensity channeled into duel- guitar workouts for musical masochists. No one controls the future, but I hope someday some punk-junk guitar player groks our trip and is like “Whoa!” If that never happens, I will have failed.
The artwork is quite stunning. Where did you find Chris Corona and did you tell him what you wanted or did he go with his own inspiration? AKB: Chris Corona was painting a mural in a taqueria.

CAB: We were trying to get tacos and he was in the way.

CZB: Chris Corona is my bandmate in another band, Hazzard's Cure. He is a well known sign painter and muralist in San Francisco. We kind of all agreed that we wanted an album cover that was somewhere between a Mission District taqueria mural and a Salvador Dali dreamscape, and I knew Corona was the man for the job.

What makes Ventura a special place for the band? AKB: Hard to say. We’ve had some good shows there. We played at the Chinese restaurant, and at the metal fest in 2017, with Cirith Ungol and Manilla Road. Good times says it all.

Why didn’t a family member learn how to play bass? lol. What happened to Melanie and what does Magic bring to the band? CAB: Hah, we ran out of family members. Our dad plays guitar, but he doesn’t fit our image.

CZB: Or does he? After our European tour, Melanie realized her priority was a new van, or a cheese farm, or some goats, or whatever.

MS: They hired me to show up and not get paid.

AKB: Magic brings mushrooms to practice sometimes.

If the world was ending and you were allowed to bring only 3 albums with you into the afterlife, what would they be and why? AKB: Led Zeppelin IV, Sabbath Volume IV, 2112, and Superunknown. Classic 4!!!

What were some live shows that made the most impression on you? What bands inspired you to create Owl and choose this path? CAB: Mammatus at Slim’s 2006, opening for Om. Beginning of the end.

AKB: Pentagram! The first time they came back and toured in 2009, with that lunatic guitarist. It was gnarly, and awesome.

Any final comments? AKB: I poured a beer down the drain and Magic will never forgive me.

MS: Yeah, because it was a Cantillon, motherfucker!

AKB: CD release of Geomancy is due out in March. Catch us in the Pacific Northwest this June!
Paragon Records has been an important label and distributor of underground metal for over two decades now. The Long Island based label led by Mike Zanchelli from Dimentianon, deserves praise and respect for promoting a scene that follows no trends and values authenticity. Here is Mike to discuss the labels origins to present day.

At what age did you get into metal and what bands were to provide this inspiration? Def Leppard’s Pyromania is where it all started for me. Their first three albums are still classic to this day for me. Then I also liked bands like Cinderella and Skid Row. As far as getting into the heavier and darker side of things, it was probably around sixth grade so twelve years old, I think. I knew and liked metal, it was when I heard King Diamond/Mercyful Fate at this time that grabbed me more than anything. Never heard anything like it or still to this day. After that the late 80’s and early 90’s death metal then the early/mid 90’s black metal and I was hooked.

What were some memorable shows that left an impression? Suffocation for Effigy of The Forgotten was my first show and that left a huge impression on me. They were brutal and the pit was intense. Great bill to. It also featured Social Disease, Human Remains, and Pyrexia. Killer show! Seeing Mercyful Fate and Death the first time left a huge impression on me as well.

How did you and Jim start the label and what was your vision from the start? Jim started the label and I came in as his partner shortly thereafter. The vision was first to release our band then called The Forgotten [now known as Dimentianon] first full-length cd namely L’aldila and shortly after that we decided we wanted to release other bands and build a nice distribution.

Do you have a list of all your releases to date? Which one do you feel most proud of? We have over seventy releases now. I used to have the releases in order but no longer. I can tell you all the bands. Aetherius Obscuritas, Aldaaron, Algol, Anael, Ash Pool, Biolich, Black Crucifixon, Buckshot (Hungary), Ghost Tower, Grey Skies Fallen, Hadez, Heretical, Impiety, Khors, Kozeljnik, Kratornas, Orbstruct, Ordalie, Panychida, Permanent Midnight, Rigor Sardonicous, Root, Sectioned, Seges Findere Shroud of Despondency, Skyforger, Storm Breeder, The Forgotten, Ulvdalir, Undimensional, Vedig Svaor, and Vorkuta and there was a noise/ambient project our old drummer Marc used to do called Prophelation and we released their cd. We are limited with what we can sign, and we also are very selective with what we will sign. You can get all the info you need on all our releases of the bands I mentioned on the metal-archives.com if anyone cares to look. For me when I signed Frost and we re-released their album Extreme Loneliness Fragments on c.d. in 2005 with bonus tracks it was a great moment since I thought it was a killer album that more people needed to hear and also it was my first official signing. Great band today as well. Truthfully every band I have been involved in signing has been an extremely proud moment for me though. Being involved with this process is a very exciting aspect of the label for me.

You value trading, something the entire scene originally thrived on, how has this allowed Paragon to grow and evolve? Trading is the underground in our opinion. It has helped the distro grow immensely. We have over five thousand items in stock now and it will continue to grow, and it is because of trading. We are known for it and wave the flag proud for this commitment. If you are into the underground but do not participate in any form of trading, even a personal trade, here and there to show support you miss the point of what the underground is truly about in our opinion. To each there own though.

I'm sure you have, but have you experienced any rip-offs through the years, or do you find most people are honest? Yes, I have had my share but most people luckily are very honest and dedicated and the rip offs get exposed quick and are soon nothing but a
Care to discuss your record store and what you have available? What would you consider your most prized stock? I have my own store in my home. Like I said earlier we have over 5000 items in stock. This includes CDs, cassettes, vinyl's, zines, DVDs, shirts etc. Our most prized stock probably would be our selection of tapes. We have over eight hundred different tape titles in stock and growing. We are known for carrying them and make sales with them regularly. But overall, on our shop you can find the best known bands to some of the most obscure bands around the world that a lot of distros do not carry, and we have great prices.

What releases will you be preparing to promote for the first quarter this year? Here is the info on our current up coming release below:

RELEASE DATE MARCH 17TH 2023
Ordalie [FRANCE] - Master Of Perdition CD. From the members of Aldaaron comes a darker more brutal black metal beast. This was originally envisioned as a demo that was to be released by Engulfed In Darkness however the label folded before it could be realized and over time this instead became a full length. There are elements of ambience and darkness that help you escape this mortal coil. An empty cold feeling is projected. At one moment they crush your skull with some of the fastest blasting ever heard once again delivered by Morkk with the distinct rasp of Ioldar tearing through the atmosphere while others they take you to a heaver darker place. Killer riffs, some chanted vocals, surround the dark void they create, and you can drift away as you choose.

RELEASE DATE APRIL 14TH 2023
Dimentianon [USA] - Chapter VI Burning Rebirth CD. Black, Death, Doom, with ambient elements. As always, the band follows NO trends and carves out a path all their own that sounds natural and refreshing. The band takes what they did on Dreaming Yuggoth slightly further and more cohesive. With long time vocalist M delivering his distinct rasp and growls and the combination of Joe Fogarazzo on guitars/bass and Don Zaros on keyboards who gel so seamlessly and Matt Hass once again delivering organic and character driven drumming. The band exits in a void where few others will enter. The first time in the band's histo-

Also these are release below we have available now:
Aldaaron [FRANCE] - Supreme Silence CD + Bonus Tracks. Originally released in 2012 from Black Skull Records. Easily one of my favorites from that year and something Paragon Records wanted to original-ly release now has finally come to pass which also features their Des Legendes Et Anciens Dieux 2007 Demo as bonus tracks! This is cold harsh Pagan black metal played with great melody and atmosphere. Some of the fastest blasting you will ever hear however the band always changes thing up nicely and naturally. They create a world all their own! The album has been remastered as well as the demo tracks for this release.

Aldaaron [FRANCE] - Arcane Mountain Cult CD. Their brand-new album!!! Once again, they continue down their dark path with harsh Pagan Black metal where Supreme Silence left off. Their music is vi-

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The imagery the band projects fits in with their music perfectly. They truly stand alone in the French and worldwide scene.

**Orbstruct [UKRAINE] - Deimos Falling** CD. Death Metal. 2nd album once again co-released with Envenomed Music. On their second offering the band got more brutal and darker. They have a dark groove that they make their own and truly some guttural vocals are to be found here. The production once again is modern but organic, which allows all instruments to breath nicely. With catchy riffs, tight playing, and an even more death metal approach then on the excellent debut the band is showing more and more they are a force to be reckoned with.

**Aetherius Obscuritas [HUNGARY] - Marti** - Black Metal CD. The sixth album and the fifth with Paragon Records and this time it is a collaboration with Grimm Distribution [Ukraine]! Once again Aetherius Obscuritas brings to you what they are now known for. Atmospheric Black Metal that is in the tradition of bands like Taake, Ragnarok etc... with their own personal touch and with new twists that only Aetherius Obscuritas can accomplish. ONLY 4 COPIES IN STOCK!

**Grey Skies Fallen [USA] - Cold Dead Lands** CD Progressive Death Doom. Co-released with Grimm Distribution and More Hate Productions. This is a re-release of their album that the band put out themselves in 2020. Once again, the band delivers a unique approach to their style with an original and powerful vocal delivery and a truly dismal atmosphere. The band also shows their growth with their song writing and how they continue to get stronger with each release while ignoring the underground trends. The production is top notch and organic. This is their most professional to date. Things can only get gloomier. Features members of Reeking Aura & Buckshot Facelift.

**Dimentianon [USA] - Dreaming Yuggoth** CD Black Death Doom. Dimentianon finally returns with their 5th full length! Once again, Dimentianon pushes the boundaries of their style. With the addition of Don Zaros [Evoken] on keyboards & Joe Fogarazzo [Rigor Sardonicus] returning on guitar & bass, the band proves how they follow their own path. Since their inception in 95 [under their original moniker The Forgotten] they always will embrace various sub genres of extreme music. With a raw, gritty, organic sound, they carve out an approach to their craft that is unique as well as diverse. Not for the trendies. One more step further as the dawn continues its descent. Enough said.

**Fornace [ITALY] - Deep Melancholic Wrath** - Black Metal CD 3rd strike by this cult. Very cold and aggressive but with a great atmosphere and some nice bass guitars work as well. Listen and escape to the cold world of Fornace. Music is everything, image is nothing. ENOUGH SAID! ALMOST SOLD OUT!

**Ghost Tower [USA] - Head Of Night** - Heavy Metal/ NWOBHM/Doom/Thrash CD. Raw, organic, with great atmosphere and a unique female voice. Some have said the feeling the band creates reminds them of old Mercyful Fate without being a carbon copy of them! ALMOST SOLD OUT!

**What do you hope to accomplish in the next 5 to 10 years with the label?** That's a long way from now. Paragon Records is over 22 years old now. Not sure we will still be going five to ten years from now. I hope so to be honest. But time will tell. I have no intention on stopping until i feel it's our time to end it. I would really like the label to generate enough income where it could give something back for all its hard work and provide a living or bare minimum a second income for me personally and also to have bigger sales for our artists so they can be compensated as well. They deserve it. Alot of our artists are extremely underrated in our opinion. We will continue to work on these goals. On the other side of that Paragon Records has truly become a force in the underground over the years and has left its mark or scar on the scene and stands on it's own merits, which no matter what the label accomplishes or does not in the future this is something we are proud of.

**Any final comments?** Thank you so much for this interview and your nice words we really appreciate it. And welcome back! The scene needs people like yourself, you are open minded, friendly, and one hundred percent dedicated. All the best to you with your endeavors my brother!
Analanon (FRANCE): Supreme Silence LP + Bonus Tracks. Originally released in 2012 by Black Skull Records. Easily one of my favorites from that era and a time Paragon Records wanted to originally release, now has finally come to pass which also features their Des legends Le Anciens Dieux 2007 Demo as bonus tracks.

Analanon (FRANCE): Arcane Mountain Cult LP. Their brand new album!! Once again, they continue down their dark path with harsh Pagan Black metal, where Supreme Silence left off. Their music is violent one moment and atmospheric the next, with all elements blending seamlessly. The album, the band perfects fits in their music perfectly! They truly stand alone in the French and worldwide scene!

www.paragonrecords.org
Chicago’s Rezn are a band impossible to label. What they’ve created with four full length, the most recent being Solace, is a style of music that defies categorization, but is all about depth and quality. We felt a need to track them down to find out more about Solace and the band’s plans.

Solace is coming out very soon - how do you feel about the album and how it sounds? I’m so excited to release this record. We’ve been creating it since 2020 so I’ve had just about every emotion towards it since that time, but today I’m feeling very proud and at peace with how it sounds. It's absolutely a culmination of our skills as a band and it's the most ambitious album we've ever made. It still sounds like a Rezn record thanks to Matt Russell, who mixed Chaotic Divine, and this time he was the studio engineer, mixing engineer, and played a huge role in producing / reducing the record into its purest essence. Zach Weeks from God City Studio also put an excellent sheen on it during the mastering process and did a great job of preserving the studio sound overall. It's basically the next chapter of Rezn and definitely leaves space for many more chapters to come.

Your recording approach for the last two records seems to be more expansive and creative than the first two records, obviously this adds a new layer to Rezn, how do you feel about the progress you are making as a band? Well our recording process for Solace was the most legitimate compared to our past studio sessions, because this time we were able to spend a week straight at Earth Analog down in Central Illinois and sleep in the upstairs apartment there. That was essential in staying in the right headspace 24/7 while tracking the record, and it allowed us to spend plenty of time on mic placement, amp tones, and all that other audio stuff you kind of skip over when recording DIY or during a short timeframe. I sometimes wonder if it was too much time because we definitely started going creatively insane towards the end, finding ourselves in fever dream moments of recording a rainstick overdub across the entire record and saying "That sounded good - time to double it."

The progress was very tangible for this record because we took such large leaps in the writing process, making sure we had clear visions for the songs before stepping foot into the studio. Once it was time to record, we had a sick blueprint that was easy to decipher and stretch out during the process, which maybe didn't happen as easily for our previous records. We definitely used the studio as an instrument this time around thanks to the freedom given by the owner, Matt Talbott, and we were able to layer in unique textures like stairway reverb and the resident grand piano there. It's all a part of the creative growth we have been craving as a band and I think it shows with this record.

Do you think there are any boundaries to what you are creating with Rezn. Are there elements that will always be essential for your sound? The only boundary I can imagine right now is a good one, and that is making music exclusively as the four original members. We're all such good friends that it would be nearly impossible to do this band with someone added or removed. The personalities and chemistry between the four of us is the DNA of Rezn, so changing that would be like the store-brand version of the band. Musically, the essential Rezn elements are always going to be sounds and melodies that transport you externally and internally. Beyond that, I can't think of any limits.

You’ve survived four full lengths and several years with no line-up changes- what is the secret to keeping your band together and focused? Do you feel each member has a more defined role within the band and if so, what is the most important thing you feel you bring to Rezn? Nice transition! The secret is to not take ourselves too seriously and just focus on a good friendship. It makes the music sound better. Each one of us definitely has a unique role that we've all sort of grown into naturally, which also makes the whole band work pretty smoothly. I'm going to self-appoint myself here as Chief Gruntwork Officer because I love doing the most boring things for some reason, like packing merch orders and answering emails, no offense, this is a fun one to respond to. Between that and keeping a level head, I just try to enjoy myself which is the top priority for me to stay sane.
You have a long tour coming up later this spring, what are your expectations for these shows? Oh yeah, we're stoked for the *Solace* release tour. Our tour plans for *Chaotic Divine* got derailed back in 2020, so it feels amazing to finally have a structured release tour for Solace that is happening while the album is still fresh in everyone's minds. We're also bringing the heavy hitters in *Oryx* and *Grivo* along with us for the east coast and west coast legs of the full US tour, respectively, so we're looking forward to hanging with them each night as an added bonus.

Also, how was your overseas touring this past fall? Any unique experiences along the way? We only got to play one show overseas last year, but we were lucky because it was Høstsabbat in Oslo, Norway. They gave us the warmest welcome and the most beautiful stage to play, which was inside this massive historic cathedral. We had some time to walk around Oslo and visit some parks and restaurants, so it was a beautiful mix of business and pleasure.

What I enjoy most while listening to *Solace* is there is an emotional element to your music expression and even with the vocal style - how are you able to capture that depth and uniqueness? That's kind of you to notice! We were going for some more personal and emotional moods for *Solace* for sure. I think it was due in part to the excessive amount of time we had to write and record, which helped the atmosphere ferment into a deep, dense version of itself. We re-recorded the vocals separately with just me and Phil in the practice space, where I pretty much just sing each phrase a hundred times until it sounds good. It's tedious, but we make sure the vocal style of every line matches each moment of the song as best as it can.

As Rezn continues to build a fanbase and reach more people, do your goals change? What are you hoping to accomplish with Rezn? Good question. We have some lofty goals for the future but we do our best to stay grounded, always making sure we're doing everything for the right reasons. Rezn is a musical canvas for us, so we just try to grow as musicians and connect with even more people with every new record. Beyond that, making good music is the eternal elusive goal.

Final comments? Listen to the new record and come to a show! Whether you love it or hate it, I will totally agree with you.

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**The Triple Axe Attack is back!!!**

'Kill The Hunted' absolutely rips from beginning to end. - KNAC.com

This is unapologetic old-school melodic metal, but sonically pristine and brimming with swagger and snot. - Classic Rock

Metal album of the year? I can't see anything beating it. - Rockpt.net

Mixed by Randy Burns (Megadeth, Kreator)
Mastered by Tom Baker (Judas Priest, Pantera)
Rigor Sardonicous has become a doom death institution. How many bands have been around for over thirty years and continuously put out a high quality product and the listener knows exactly what to expect? I always remember seeing their albums at None Of The Above Records in Centereach. Here is one half of the Rigor Sardonicous duo, Joe Fogarazzo for an interview.

How do you feel about Praeparet Bellum? Greetings and thank you for this time. We are pleased with this latest effort. It shows sustain of our sound as well as growth while keeping our sonic primal, limbic dread intact.

It’s been about ten years since your last full length was released, has the recording process for Rigor Sardonicous changed at all between the two albums? In 2018 there was the four song extended ep Ridenti Mortuus which was released digitally and on cassette through Witch Sermon Productions. This was later released with bonus material from other ep’s and singles by Silent Time Noise Records in 2020. Aside from programming the drums differently the overall approach has remained the same. I was in Teloch Vovin from 2012-2018 so Rigor was not the focus which points to the delay.

Your band has always been a perfect representation of doom metal with death imagery and inspiration, what has always drawn you to this dark side of life? It is a direct reflection of how we feel among the futility of it all that we are simply plodding along towards our end, coping with existence, and in the meantime we get to watch all we love wither away.

When you die, what type of legacy do you wish to leave behind? What would you consider your best accomplishment? Our detractors would have a great many things to say yet we always felt we were the underground of the underground and we will let our admirers retain that. One has to completely go through the Jungian individuation process or they will not understand what we are about as we are not for the frail.

It’s sad to think that a great store like None Of The Above Records would struggle in today’s world and there are so many music venues here that are gone- what are some memories you have when it comes to the metal scene on Long Island? The current stage of the economy all over is not conducive to what gave us such wonderful aspects of our lives and this is not just local unfortunately. Prior to None Of The Above there were other great record shops around here, Slipped Disc, Agents of Fortune, Uncle Phil’s, Busy Bee, Mothers Music. The demise of Sundance, a local club, was a significant loss the music scene never recovered from.

We have other extreme metal bands like Dimentianon, Internal Bleeding, Suffocation - are there any bands you’ve come across that you think deserves recognition? I play in Dimentianon as well, again, having left initially in 2007. We released two full-length albums so far, Dreaming Yuggoth in 2021 and the immediately forthcoming Chapter VI: Burning Rebirth.

The covid restrictions and vaccine mandates seem absurd in hindsight, do you think the whole covid frenzy was overrated and didn’t deliver the massive death the experts predicted? When that crap started I was working in an emergency response capacity which enabled me to talk with many people all over and immediately on I was deeply skeptical. When I asked about what is and may be going on I was repeatedly told to shut up and stop asking questions - huge red flag. I am against every mandate that was pushed the world over. It was all overblown. I am not denying the illness and death that has occurred but many things became skewed. I think just about every ‘decision’ that was made had no public health concern and was a power grab from the political elements from all sides. The population got markedly dumber very quickly. This is a true low point for humanity.

What do you think has been your most satisfying accomplishment? I would say maintaining our consistency of sound and style which is also unique in the scene is a worthy accomplishment.

Final comments? We sincerely appreciate the interview and we welcome you back! Seek us at https://rigorsardonicous1.bandcamp.
FROSTBITT - MACHINE DESTROY
12" GATEFOLD VINYL

180 GRAM RED VINYL HOUSED IN SLEEK GATEFOLD DESIGN
62 x 62 CM DOUBLE SIDED POSTER WITH OPERATIONAL INTEL REPORT, AND SPECTACULAR ARTWORK BY GONZALO "ZATTDOTT" SEPULVEDA.
EXCLUSIVE OBI STRIP
STICKER BUNDLE

PRODUCT MOCKUPS - FINAL PRODUCT MAY VARY
Australia’s **Toxicon** are one of the best metal bands that you will hear this year. Pickup up where nineties greats like **Vicious Rumors, Metal Church, and Nevermore** were and taking those power thrash metal bands into the modern age with a long album filled with diversity and quality. Here are some questions we sent over to **Toxicon**.

**How do you feel about the final result and how it sounds and it looks?** The album did take quite a while to actually come to release, you’re right. We started writing immediately after we released our first album **Purge** in 2016 and immediately got something we liked with our next single “Circling” so we recorded and toured that, writing the whole time. By the time we hit 2019 we had in the vicinity of forty songs written that we cut down to the 11 that we have on the album, and over a period of time we had refined all these songs several times over to make sure all members were happy before we went into the studio to record in mid June of that year. It was a long period of time but I think that process helped give the songs the time they needed to be refined and perfected in all their facets. The finished product is fantastic as a result and I think the music stands up against any band releasing world level music today. Visually we also take a lot of pride in our artwork and our products. We had a hunt through fivrr looking for the right artist and came across Leonardo Ambrosini, an Italian artist who ended up taking us through the process and we came up with a beautiful artwork on the other side. It also looks great on all our merch and graphics and really stands out in a lineup with other artwork. Being a metal band there is always an expectation of things to be dark and brutal, with skulls and death and what not, and that’s just not who we are. Instead, we always look to make something visually beautiful and full of hidden details that our fans might want to print out and put on the wall and I think Leo did a stellar job of that.

**What were some of the difficulties you went through while trying to get this out to the public?** Although we finished our recording in 2019 the album itself didn’t get out until late 2022. The most obvious reason for this is the pandemic. We had a few friends in other bands who had released new albums during this time and not only couldn’t tour it but the labels they were on didn’t put enough time and effort into the releases either and they fell flatter than they should have for how good they were. So, we decided it would be best to leave it until the opportunities were back to tour the album and if we got signed, that the labels would put in the time for us. Our other problem was that we had gone close to radio silent for a good while and we didn’t want to release just out of the blue. So, we spent the almost two years going hard on the content train. Drum covers, guitar bass and drum playthroughs of “Purge” material, guitar lessons for our songs done by our guitarist, Adam. We started pushing out videos left, right and center to help build some stock in the band before we dropped the album. And for the most part it worked. We got YouTube partnership on our channel as well as a bunch of people following the Spotify and other services that really helped get the music out to more people.

**Do you think having this diversity is necessary to show the many facets and interests of the band?** I think for us it is almost necessary. We all get a say in how the music goes and we all have different tastes that we draw inspiration from and in keeping us all happy we come out with a very diverse collection of songs. There are definitely those out there who would think that the songs may be a little too varied and that the album may lack a single overall character but I prefer it that way. It means the album will always be fresh and interesting. Your favourite song first listen might not be your favourite on the tenth listen, and might change depending on the mood you’re in. Thrash, Alternative Rock, Prog, Nu Metal, straight up Heavy Metal, there’s a mix of all of it in there, which is why we like to call it Hybrid Metal. There is a bit of something for everybody in there and we wouldn’t have it any other way.

**How is the metal scene in Australia these days? Are there many venues to play live shows? Has the economic issues been getting worse in Australia these days?** The metal scene in Australia is still in a state of recovery I feel. It depends on who you ask. After the pandemic it took a little while to start getting international acts back over again and the local bands were doing everything they could to get things up and running again as soon as they were allowed. But despite all the work the musicians are putting in there is still a long way to go. We still get Covid outbreaks after large events and its harder to get punters out of their homes and into a venue to watch local bands. Accompany that with rising interest rates and food prices and people just don’t have the disposable income they used too to go out and have a good night at a show. I’ve even had trouble booking shows as a lot of venues won’t touch you unless they know you will draw them a reasonable crowd as the venues suffered just as badly as anybody through the pandemic and need to
How are your songs written? It’s kind of a mixed bag to be honest. All the musicians in the band write music and have totally different styles to each other. Usually, a song starts as an idea brought in by someone. Most of the time it’s a fully finished song but sometimes it might just be a chorus or a verse idea, or even a vibe for a song. And from that point we all take a look at it and start to pull it apart. We take out the parts that don’t make sense or change riffs to others that have a similar character but better suit the music. Then we throw it over to Wayne, our singer, and he throws down lyrics on the top of that. As a group we go through the vocal parts and help Wayne pick which voices to use, as he has about six, and add our own little parts to the whole mix as we all have different voices too. And you can hear all of those throughout the album. Not every song gets this kind of treatment but when it’s worth it and we know we’ve got a win the album. Not every song gets this kind of treatment.

What do you feel is the most important thing you add to Toxicon? For me I would say its my song writing. I spend a hell of a lot of time listening to bands and figuring out how the best of the best assemble their songs. Im always writing down techniques and cool elements from other people’s songs that I would want to use for our stuff and always making sure we never get stuck in a formula with our song structures and riffs. I am known within in our band as being hard to impress with things and I think that’s a good thing. We’re good at regulating ourselves to make sure we only put out good music and nothing weak slips through the cracks.

How did you decide to become a drummer? Did you feel it came natural or was it something you had to really work at to get this good? I started drumming when I was about eight years old and I’ve never really stopped or taken a break since. My brothers both played piano and my dad played guitar but neither of those really interested me at the time and I guess i just enjoyed being behind the drum kit more. I ended up getting lessons when I was younger but beyond the basics, I’m mostly self-taught. I have a natural ear for drums as well as the musical note in general which makes it easy for me to pick up parts quickly without having to read notation, and it’s helpful in the studio too for pitching vocals. But even with natural skills I still had to practice loads to get to where I am. Speed is always a factor in metal and I’m always playing to try to improve my speed and consistency with both my feet AND my hands. I also love listening and learning from other creative drummers so it’s a never ending journey trying to better my playing and my song writing.

Some bands release every song they ever record, your band wrote about three dozen songs and chose the best ones to represent the album- why do you feel this way works best for you? When we started the process we wanted to do what we thought “Professional bands” did, which was essentially write a whole stack of songs and pick from the best to go to the studio with. In hindsight we probably could have spent a year less time writing and focused more on writing the songs we needed to rather than just entertaining every idea, which I think we will do moving forward with the next album. Wayne (Singer) has just moved across half the country so we will be doing everything via correspondence moving forwards so we need to streamline our process from last album to make sure we get the same product in a more concise manner this time around.

Any final comments? Thank you so much for giving us the time to talk about our music and the help to support our new album Be The Fire and Wish For The Wind. For all those out there reading this, if you like the music, head to our YouTube page and subscribe there to see everything we do as it comes out, and add our social pages for any new news that you might want to hear about the band.
URANIUM

Uranium is an exciting new brutal industrial metal project of Adam Ashbaugh. They previously released Wormboiler, which was a combination of the first two e.p.s. The debut album, An Exacting Punishment, is out now and this would be a band to check out if you like Black Magnet or Godflesh, but want some more brutality. Here is Adam to introduce us all to indstrial brutal metallers Uranium.

I first encountered Uranium browsing through the Sentient Ruin bandcamp and was blown away by how intense Uranium is, what did you hope to accomplish with this when you started? Uranium was meant to be a sonic weapon, plain and simple. I wanted to combine everything that I love about dissonant music whether it be inspired by industrial, harsh noise, black metal, etc. Uranium as a project essentially is meant to be the auditory expression of calamity and destruction.

Is it easier to work alone or do you see yourself adding musicians? Uranium is a solo project, through and through. If the right collaborator were to emerge I would consider working with them, but Uranium itself will always remain its own entity.

I hear some Godflesh and Controlled Bleeding in your sound, but this Is much more intense than anything Justin or Paul and Chris have ever done, what inspires you to create this type of extreme music? Those two acts are definite influences in my sound but everything about Uranium is dialed up to eleven. There is no subtlety to its sound, pushing boundaries of extreme music without being limited to one specific type of genre. There is a freedom to being able to write a death metal track then follow it up with a grind core-influenced industrial weapon.

What provides inspiration for the lyrical content and how did you come to choose this type of vocal style? The lyrical content of Uranium is almost one hundred percent inspired by man’s obsession with destruction. Vocal style is meant to sound as agonizing as possible to match these themes.

How do you write these songs? I have no writing process truly, it varies from song to song. Sometimes it starts with a sample that catches my ear, sometimes it starts with drum pattern, honestly a song by the end of my writing process usually never remotely resembles the initial track.

Why do you think not many extreme metal bands and artists have added the cold, machine like extreme you can get from industrial sounds? There definitely seems to be an emerging group of artists that have been adding a more industrial element to their sound. But I feel that extreme industrial metal has been around for quite a while now, but recently it’s definitely been pushed to an extreme.

Will Uranium play live or is it just a studio project? No real plans to take Uranium live yet. Uranium has always been a solo project and getting a band together to perform this music wouldn’t be ideal. I have been working on another project whose sound definitely could be performed by a live band.

Do you have to be an angry person in daily life to create this type of music or do you feel Uranium is different from your personality? Everybody has anger, channeling it into creating this destructive music is a sort of therapy for me.

Final comments? An Exacting Punishment was a record that was finished over two years ago that was relentlessly delayed by Covid. I am extremely proud to see it finally released and also extremely excited for everyone to hear the new music that has been worked on during those two years.
Canada’s *Vision Eternel* is the creative project of Alexander Julien. An engaging writer and musician, Alex is founder of the record label Abridged Pause Recordings and he is here to discuss his career, his love of *Faith No More*, and several other topics.

**Let’s start off with this special Valentine's Day release. What should readers know about it and why is Valentine's Day special in the world of *Vision Eternel*?** *Vision Eternel* started because I was heartbroken over one of my ex-girlfriends. It had been quite some time since we had broken up, and I had since been in other relationships, but when I found myself single again, I quickly remembered how much I missed her. I was in a lot of pain; I just could not get over her. It was then early January 2007, and I was in an extremely depressive state; but I was also in an extremely creative phase.

One afternoon, I picked up one of my guitars and started playing whatever came to me naturally, without direct influence of any genre or style; it was all mood. The song with which I came up and recorded was "Love Within Beauty". At first, I did not know what to do with the song, since it was so different from the black metal and death metal music that I played in my other bands. It was also too emotional and hopeful in nature to fit within the scope of my dark ambient band Soufferance. A few nights later, I found myself in the same mood and wound up composing and recording another song, "Love Within Isolation". It was at that moment that *Vision Eternel* properly started, and I decided to write more songs in that style to document my heartbreak.

Within a month, I had composed and recorded six short pieces for this new project and a whole concept began to form around it. Each song was titled after a phase that I went through with my ex-girlfriend: from meeting her, through the break-up, and finally, the agony of having to move on. But the concept went deeper: the first letter of each song title was taken from my ex-girlfriend's name, so that the track listing on the back cover would spell her name. I titled the release *Seul Dans L'obsession* (Alone In Obsession in French), because that is how I felt at the time. That theme is also represented in the band's name, *Vision Eternel*: being eternally nostalgic of a past relationship. I think that the name still holds up today and is still true to my recent releases.

Another concept within the release was that the first chords that open the extended play in "Love Within Beauty" are the same ones (though played differently) that end it in "Love Within Extended" (the unlisted piece at the end of "Love Within Isolation"), thereby giving the release a conceptual loop. I also decided to handle all of the artwork myself (instead of working with my usual art designers), and directed and edited a music video for the single "Love Within Narcosis". The music video and the pictures for the artwork were shot at the same location and have similar visual elements to tie them together.

This was my first concept album and it was a turning point in my musical career. I put more effort into it than for any of my other bands' releases at the time. I could feel that this extended play was something really special. It was so intimate. That was because I had composed and recorded the music without any inhibitions or hindrances; it was all heart, all emotions. Because of this elaborate and intimate concept within the release, I decided that the perfect release date would be Valentine's Day. After all, this was a documentation of a broken heart, and how much more lonely can a depressed single person feel than on Valentine's Day. As such, the release date became part of the concept.

Once *Seul Dans L'obsession* was released, I was not sure if there would be a future for *Vision Eternel*. How can one make a sequel to a relationship which has already been fully documented? Recording that music had helped me to move on from that ex-girlfriend, but I was still suffering from chronic depression. In May 2007, I realized that there was another recent ex-girlfriend from whom I had difficulty recovering. It suddenly made perfect sense that *Vision Eternel*’s next release should document that other relationship, starting from when I was depressed over the earlier-mentioned girl, through meeting the new girl, the dating, breaking up, and finally, being alone all over again. Another relationship's full cycle. Coincidentally, it mirrored the theme of my favorite film, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: Boy meets girl, boy loses girl. Boy meets girl again, boy loses girl again. Each new *Vision Eternel* extended play tells the story of another past relationship.
The second concept extended play, *Un Automne En Solitude* (*An Autumn In Solitude* in French), was recorded between May and July 2007, but I deliberately withheld it from release until the forthcoming Valentine's Day in 2008. This established the tradition of releasing all Vision Eternel material on Valentine's Day. However, I faced issues with the artwork of *Un Automne En Solitude* and the release was delayed until March 14, 2008. That release date was deliberate as well. I decided that if I could not have it out on February 14th, then it would be released on the 14th of the next possible month.

On Valentine's Day 2009, I was successful in releasing the Japanese compilation *An Anthology Of Past Misfortunes*, which compiled the first two extended plays with three unreleased b-sides and a poster. Unfortunately, Vision Eternel's third concept extended play, *Abondance De Périls* (*Abondance Of Perils* in French), missed the Valentine's Day 2010 deadline because of mastering delays. Instead, it was released on March 9, 2010; it is the only Vision Eternel extended play that was not released on the 14th of a month and I have come to regret this profusely. I see it as a flaw in Vision Eternel's timeline. The date was selected because it was the closest Tuesday to the 14th. At the time, official music releases by professional record labels were always released on a Tuesday, and I was attempting to treat my record label as professionally as possible.

However, 2010 did introduce the back-up plan: the Valentine's Day Exclusive. Since I knew that the mastering of *Abondance De Périls* would miss the holiday deadline, I offered my fans a "heartbreak treat", a previously-unreleased song from the band's archives. I have since tried to honor this tradition for Vision Eternel fans each year when I do not have a new release ready for Valentine's Day, so that no matter the situation, they always have something to look forward to on that day.

I always aimed to release the following Vision Eternel extended plays on Valentine's Day, but *The Last Great Torch Song* was delayed in 2012 because of recording, mastering and artwork changes. *Echoes From Forgotten Hearts* was successfully released on Valentine's Day 2015. Then the *An Anthology Of Past Misfortunes* boxed set missed both the 2017 and 2018 Valentine's Day deadlines due to ridiculous pressing and printing plant errors. Finally, *For Farewell Of Nostalgia* was delayed by a change of artwork, but also by the need to line-up a suitable release date between three different record labels. It is hard for me to properly convey how important releasing Vision Eternel material on Valentine's Day is to me. It has become such a symbolic event within the greater concept of the band, and I become very sad if it looks as if a new release will miss the deadline. I am also eternally regretful of all the past years when releases could not be released on Valentine's Day, or of years when I did not offer my fans a "heartbreak treat". Over the last few years, I took to preparing the Valentine's Day Exclusives many months in advance, so that I never have to miss one again. I have something very special planned for the band's twentieth anniversary on Valentine's Day 2027, but that is still a few years away.

It appears that the visual component is essential for the Vision Eternel experience. What are some themes and images that capture the emotion behind the music of Vision Eternel?

Vision Eternel will (hopefully) always project a global sense of sadness and loneliness. Although the band has included, in very brief periods, other members, it stemmed from my past failed relationships, so these are very personal and despairing themes. I do not put on a facade or persona for this band or for the public. I try to offer a very honest depiction of who I am and how I live my life. I am a pessimist and nihilist. But I am also very nostalgic. There is an element of hopefulness and romance in Vision Eternel, but more in the sense of "Will she ever come back to me?". Or a nostalgic moment of what once was. It certainly is not advocating a light at the end of the tunnel.
During the band's early period, I wanted to control every component of the concept, so I handled all of the visuals myself, including the cover artworks, the band photographs, the band logo, the merchandise designs, and all of the online designs. I tried to convey those sad, lonely and solitary emotions with photography, but it was never my specialty. I have a better eye for a complete picture, but not much for breaking down the elements of what makes it work. I really liked using items that give off a little bit of light in the middle of darkness, like a lantern, a lamppost, a firefly, a fading sunset, a moon, a light beam, or a lit-up window. I am a night person and I prefer grey rainy days; I also have blue eyes that are very sensitive to light, so without getting too Freudian, that might be an explanation of why I enjoy those visual items, both in real life and in art.

After three releases, I began to work with other visual artists. I still handled most of the layout designs, but the principal visuals were created by others. My at the time roommate, Marina Polak, provided a beautiful photograph that was used for the cover art of Abondance De Péris and The Last Great Torch Song. My at the time best friend, Jeremy Roux, took care of band pictures and videos, the band logo, the online media design, and eventually the cover art of Echoes From Forgotten Hearts. More recently, Rain Frances has been contributing a great deal with band pictures, videos and paintings, Christophe Szpajdel provided a new band logo, and Micheal Koelsch has been painting the latest album covers. With these people on board, I have been able to introduce different types of visual arts, and ones which I feel can reach the inner emotions of more people.

In addition to the sad and lonely themes, the principal visual style of Vision Eternel is taken from German films of the 1920s and 1930s, American films of the 1940s and 1950s, and French films of the 1960s and 1970s; notably expressionism, pulp, film noir and neo-noir. Vision Eternel is very cinematic, and my mood is deeply influenced and affected by watching movies. Prior to writing or recording music, I will often watch a movie to set my mood. I have taken in strong visual influences from such directors as Alfred Hitchcock, Douglas Sirk, Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Orson Welles, Jean-Pierre Melville, Jacques Deray and Henri Verneuil; cinematographers as John Alton, Stanley Cortez, Robert Burks and Nicholas Musuraca; and also the photographic portraits of Yousuf Karsh. I try to incorporate that into the cover artworks and the band's promotional photographs.

But there are two aspects of the visual presentation that I take into consideration: the digital presentation and the physical presentation. In the early days of the band, the visual presentation was rather limited because our fan-base was principally on the internet. Very few compact discs of our early releases exist; our releases were mostly distributed digitally. As such, I was restricted by how I had to present Vision Eternel to the public.

Once I was given the chance of releasing Vision Eternel material on wide-spread physical formats, it presented an opportunity for another level of conceptual art. Obviously not as extraordinary as a band like Tool's releases, but within the limitations of the record labels with which Vision Eternel collaborates. And I think that I have tried to push them to produce packages that are a little more elaborate than the ones with which their other bands are content... and sometimes to the detriment of Vision Eternel. Several record labels have abandoned Vision Eternel releases mid-way through the production because of my high standards. But I would prefer to cancel a release and find a new partner, rather than offer a sub-par product to my fans. They deserve better than that.

My goal with Vision Eternel's physical releases is to offer an interesting packaging, not necessarily an innovative one, but one which at least enables me to share a bigger story with my fans who chose to venture on the path of tangible media (rather than streaming music through digital devices). There is a much deeper concept to Vision Eternel, which as you said is not only auditory, but also visual. I want to offer an old-fashioned listening experience to my fans. The excitement of obtaining the album, sitting down and reading through the liner notes and discovering new things about the band, and being absorbed by the artwork while listening to the music. Of course, all of this can be done digitally, but it will never be the same as a tangible product.
I know you've said that the music from Vision Eternel came naturally and you've really built this entity from the ground up - how do you balance your evolution as an artist with the expectations that fans have for you? Do Vision Eternel fans really have an expectation of the band? Honestly, I have no idea. I have never heard anyone say "The old stuff was better", nor have I heard "The new songs are nicer". More often, I hear of people either liking or disliking my music. Perhaps some of the older fans have come to expect something sad and longing; something that they can listen to when they are depressed. That is my personal expectation of Vision Eternel. And that will always be the case with Vision Eternel because those emotions are part of my personality.

I think that Vision Eternel's fan-base is pretty diverse and open-minded, and I feel that it is because my music was never truly accepted by a single genre's scene or community. Whenever I, my fans, or critics would put a tag to categorize the band's music, others quickly came along to debunk it and reject it. Some of the genres with which Vision Eternel has been associated over the years include ambient, dark ambient, ethereal, dark wave, drone, minimalism, emo, shoegaze, dream pop, dream rock, space rock, post-rock and post-post-black metal (that is not a typographical error).

The objections from stringent fans of those genres were that Vision Eternel's music is not ambient, ethereal or dark wave because it lacks keyboards or other electronic instruments; not shoegaze, dream pop or dream rock because it lacks vocals; not post-rock because it lacks drums; not post-post-black metal because it lacks distortion; not dark ambient because it is too hopeful and bright; not drone because it is too structured; not minimalist because it is too layered; and not space rock because it lacks a psychedelic element. As such, Vision Eternel does not have the luxury of being suggested in many people's lists, definitive or broad, of bands that showcase or fit certain genres. And as a result, I suspect that people most likely discover Vision Eternel by accident, and that my music just happens to hit the right timber in their ears and they become fans, regardless of the genre. I do not think that I am an avant-garde or experimental musician or composer by any means, but I do think that people need a certain open-mindedness to appreciate Vision Eternel.

There is one thing that I have heard several times from fans, and that is that they like hearing the eBow. I make it a point to use it on all of my new songs, whereas in the past, it was only occasionally utilized. That is one element in the evolution of the band. Another is that I have developed and arranged longer and fuller songs in recent years. Early Vision Eternel compositions were much shorter and more minimalistic. The progression came about when I decided to make Vision Eternel my priority, after several years of shuffling between multiple bands. As I got older, I realized that I was not able to contribute as prolifically as I once did, perhaps because as one gets older, one becomes more critical of material being released. I decided to put my atmospheric black metal band, Vision Lunar, on an indefinite hiatus, and terminate my other ambient projects, Souffrance and Citadel Swamp. Once that was accomplished, I was able to incorporate some of my favorite songwriting elements from those other bands into Vision Eternel's music, such as Souffrance's lengthy, repetitive, almost hypnotic, segues and codas, Citadel Swamp's multi-instrument layering, and also from an older band, Éphémère's textural guitar leads. Perhaps this helped to bridge the gap for fans of my other bands to also start enjoying Vision Eternel.
You have played with all types of bands–other than Vision Eternel, what band do you feel the strongest connection to? Will you be returning to the more extreme metal genres with any future projects?

I am definitely still (and will likely always be) a metalhead. It might come as a surprise, but I do not listen to the type of music which I make with Vision Eternel. I have listened to, just out of curiosity, a handful of ambient, dark ambient, shoegaze, dream pop, ethereal, drone and post-rock bands, but that is not the type of music which I enjoy (perhaps that is why Vision Eternel's music does not truly fit within those genres?).

I most certainly miss playing metal. I also miss playing in a band, more so lately, though I have become a recluse over the past ten years, and that would be difficult to change (even if I wanted to). Even before withdrawing from society, I had great difficulty finding musicians with similar styles and ideals for my bands. I always seemed to meet musicians who were controlling and dictating and who would not treat the band as a collaboration with equal partnerships. I do not work well in that environment because I am very creative and I have a need for my ideas to be heard. But since I am principally a guitarist (I can handle bass guitar and have done lead and backing vocals in some of my previous bands), I do need to rely on others in a full band setting.

I also realized that black metal had become extremely trendy during the 2010s, and that made me shy away from it. Part of me wanted to wait out the new wave of trend-followers before returning on that path. However, I had a phase of creativity in 2015, which yielded the extended play Luna Subortus by my atmospheric black metal band Vision Lunar. The band is somewhat of a counterpart to Vision Eternel, in which I can play more aggressive music. I do see a future in Vision Lunar, though it has been on hiatus since 2016. But I have several plans in mind and a couple of songs that I have been slowly arranging over the years. I had hoped to work on this material in 2022, but a certain Vision Eternel release consumed nearly all of my time. At this point, Vision Lunar is also a solo project (though it formerly had other members), so it cannot be compared to playing in a full metal band.

I think that if I meet the right people down the line, I would be happy to take part in another metal band.

I read that Faith No More is your favorite band–what makes them special for you as a fan and listener? (other than their latest album, I've loved them all–especially Angel Dust of course). Do you think Mike Patton's Ipecac label has been a great place for creative artists to release music?

I am an immense fan of Faith No More. I always tell people that I am a Faith No More fan first, and a Mike Patton fan second. By that I mean that I like Faith No More universally, even with its early vocalists and guitarists, and later guitarists. I am not restricted to the Patton-era or Martin-era of Faith No More. I have listened to most of Patton's other bands and projects, some of which I enjoyed but not all of them. I really like Mr. Bungle and Lovage, early Tomahawk and some Fantômas.

I discovered Faith No More during an important period of my mid-teenage years, when I was very depressed (sounds familiar?) and also had a lot of free time, which allowed me to delve into their retrospective career. One of my closest friends, Thomas Nunziata, was a huge fan of everything Patton, and he introduced me to Faith No More. He and I spent during the summer of 2003, while working at the American Red Cross in a really ghetto area of Plainfield, New Jersey. I remember that during my lunch breaks, one of the other employees and I would walk a block over for take-out Chinese food, and on the way, he would show me the blood-stained sidewalks where gang shootings had taken place. I came from a very clean-cut area in northern Edison, New Jersey, so seeing that as a teenager made me feel like I was "cool".

Nunziata and I spent many, many days at the American Red Cross that summer, doing clerical work, preparing material for their First Aid and CPR classes, and organizing donated items. As you can imagine, that gave us a lot of time to talk about music. He had a very broad and deep knowledge of music (his father was a radio disc jockey, so he grew up with a lot of music), and was always raving about Patton. He told me that he had seen his band Tomahawk open for Tool, of which we were both fans, the summer prior. Nunziata knew that I was a metalhead, so he introduced me to the world of Patton a few days later by sending me, via America On Line Instant Messenger, some Fantômas tracks from their debut album, and Faith No More's "Malpractice". He thought that
these heavier songs would be up my alley, but the lack of obvious melodic elements threw me off and I am almost ashamed to admit that I did not even listen to "Malpractice" all the way through.

Later that summer, he and I were driving around in his van when he put on Tomahawk's debut. I liked this band immediately, especially the songs "Flashback" and "God Hates A Coward". My friend explained that when Tomahawk played those songs live, Patton sang into a gas mask and the members dressed in police uniforms. I was intrigued, and as soon as I returned to my parents' house, I downloaded live footage of the band performing on Channel [V] in Australia from February 2002. That captivated me. I then read up on Patton and slowly began learning about all of the bands and projects he had done over the years. As a special surprise to Nunziata, I started downloading all of the video footage that I could find of Patton's bands, which I planned to burn on digital video discs for us to watch together (this was still a few years before Rhino Records re-issued Faith No More's video home system releases on digital video discs).

It was while going through these videos that I became a fan of Faith No More. I heard "Epic" and was amazed. That song was so melodic and catchy. I immediately called Nunziata on the telephone and told him that I was now a fan of Faith No More, but that I "liked their first vocalist better". I was under the impression that "Epic" had been recorded with Chuck Mosley because the vocals were mostly rapped and the singer had long hair; I only knew Patton from the Tomahawk videos. After setting me straight, Nunziata offered to make me copies of The Real Thing and Angel Dust. I still remember the first time that I heard The Real Thing: I was in my father's car, leaving Nunziata's house to go back to my parents', and the instant "From Out Of Nowhere" started playing, I was addicted. Again, I think that it was the amount of melody from Bottom's keyboards and Patton's vocals that absorbed me. And Jim Martin's guitar was unlike anything that I had ever heard. The songs "The Real Thing" and "Zombie Eaters" also became favorites.

Earlier, I mentioned that I had a lot of free time. By this point in the story, it was early autumn 2003, and I was in-between schools, having been asked to leave New York Military Academy. I was simply without motivation to accomplish any school work; I was too depressed. So while my parents and several "experts" debated if I should be sent to another private school, or be given another chance at public school, I remained at my parents' house and saturated myself in music. Nunziata and I had an acoustic folk project, The Tom & Alex Project, and I also had my own rock band, The Slopin Fairy.

During the day, however, when I had the house to myself, I would listen to Faith No More on repeat for hours. Initially, it was The Real Thing, then Angel Dust. It really became an obsession. But it was also a form of comfort because the music kept me company. It was not music that I would put on and only half-listen to in the background; I was actively and deliberately listening. I would play a specific album five times in a row, each time focusing my attention solely to one instrument. So I would listen to the entire album only hearing Martin's guitar tracks, then Gould's bass guitar tracks, then Bordin's drum tracks, then Bottom's keyboard tracks, and finally Patton's vocal tracks. I also watched and analyzed their music videos (I discovered Alfred Hitchcock through Faith No More, they have made numerous references to him and his movies in their work). I was also fascinated by the band's four-hour interview session with MTV that was filmed during the making of Angel Dust. This was before YouTube existed, so it was difficult to locate video footage online. I also joined tape-trading communities (which had by then become mostly digital) and tracked down live concerts of Faith No More. I loved listening to those, especially ones from the Angel Dust era.

Eventually, my parents consented to let me return to public school (which I also did not enjoy). Each morning, I would take my portable compact disc player, put on my headphones, and listen to Faith No More as I walked over to Nunziata's house on the way to John P. Stevens High School. By the winter of 2003, King For A Day, Fool For A Lifetime was also in heavy rotation, and I later became obsessed with Album Of The Year in the spring of 2004, while I dealt with a break-up. That album had several softer moments, so it was perfect timing. I also learned to appreciate Introduce Yourself and We Care A Lot, though this happened about a year later. I consider Introduce Yourself my third-favorite Faith No More album, behind Angel Dust and The Real Thing.
I became known as "the Faith No More guy" around town, because the first question that I asked everyone whom I met was "Do you know Faith No More?". I also nearly always wore Faith No More t-shirts (some that I purchased on eBay, others that I spray-painted myself in my parents' garage) and Mr. Bungle t-shirts and a hoodie (which at the time you could still purchase officially from their website, but licensed to Cinder Block).

This reminds me of an interesting story about when my Mr. Bungle hoodie was stolen. It happened during the autumn of 2005. I had become friends with a drummer named Michael Vassallo, who lived in the nearby town of Metuchen, New Jersey and played in the incredible post-rock band Black Sand And Starless Nights (I later released some of their material through Abridged Pause Recordings). Vassallo joined the metal band Mutiny (later signed to Roadrunner Records and renamed Mutiny Within) in 2005, replacing their original drummer Phillip Petrov, and he invited me to one of his first rehearsals with them. Mutiny was not necessarily a popular band (this was before they started playing serious shows), but every metalhead at John P. Stevens High School knew them. Vassallo came to pick me up at my parents' house one afternoon, and on the way to the rehearsal studio which the band had rented, he and I listened to Mr. Bungle's eponymous album. I was, of course, wearing my Mr. Bungle hoodie. Shortly into the band's practice, I took off my hoodie and placed it on an amplifier behind me. I cannot recall if it was halfway through the band's set, or at the end of it, but we all wound up outside, some members to smoke cigarettes, others to call on their rides and girlfriends. I also cannot remember who drove me back to my parents' house, perhaps Andrew Jacobs and his brother Brendan, since their parents lived very close to mine, or perhaps Luis Obregon, since he and I knew each other well.

What I do remember is that when I arrived at my parents' house, I immediately realized that I had forgotten my hoodie! And this was an important hoodie. As soon as my mother arrived, I convinced her to drive me back to the rehearsal space, which was located about twenty minutes away, in another part of town where I had never been previously, but which I somehow remembered how to find. I ran in, looked around, but it was not where I had left it. I asked the manager if he had seen it, but he was clueless and proceeded with the standard dialect of not being responsible for lost items (even though I had not accused him nor made any claims). Back at my parents' house, I called and chatted with each member of Mutiny, asking if they had seen my hoodie, but none of them had any information. A couple of the members had shady reputations, so I was never fully convinced of their innocence, but I had nothing to go on.

About half a year later, I finally found out what happened to my hoodie. Vassallo had stolen it! He posted a picture on MySpace of himself wearing it, and I immediately called him out on it! He quickly removed the picture and denied my accusation profusely, saying that he never had a Mr. Bungle hoodie. And to this day, he still denies having stolen it! Obviously, I did not hold a grudge because I worked with Black Sand And Starless Nights through Abridged Pause Recordings years later, but it would have been nice for him to own up to the theft. It is practically a running gag at this point, as whenever we talk (though it has now been a few years) I bring up "Hey, what about my Mr. Bungle hoodie?".

Back to Faith No More... I once planned to write a book about them. It was to be titled Kings Of A Lifetime - The Definitive Story Of Faith No More and I was in communication with some of the members. I had read Steffan Chirazi's incredible book Faith No More: The Real Story, which at the time was the only official biography of the band. I really, really loved that book, but it stopped in late 1993, with Martin leaving the band, so it was not complete enough to satisfy my obsession. Chirazi did later provide a write-up and interview with the band for the King For A Life...
Day, Fool For A Lifetime seven-inch vinyl boxed set in 1995, as well as the liner notes for the Who Cares a Lot? greatest hits compilation in 1998, which round-ed out some parts of the story. But I wanted to know more, and I wanted to document this missing knowledge.

This took place roughly during the spring, summer and autumn of 2006, and my friend Robert Alvarez (who lived in Miami, Florida and was also a huge Faith No More fan) and I were planning to take a road trip to Los Angeles and San Francisco, California to work on the book and visit historic Hollywood filming locations. I had recently received my high school diploma and wanted to pursue music full-time, whether it be writing about it or composing songs. While waiting on Alvarez, I began interviewing some of the band members. I got to chat with Bottom, Gould, Dean Menta and Joe Pye, their first vocalist, who shared with me some very interesting information on the early days, such as their first name after quitting Faith. No Man. (before they settled on Faith. No More.) was Your Grandmother's Penis. I do not think that this tidbit of information was ever published anywhere.

By late July 2006, Alvarez still had not made up his mind about going west, so I ended up moving to Montreal, Canada instead. The funny thing about it all is that he ended up moving to Los Angeles three years later, but I never made it out. While in Montreal, I secured a publishing deal for the book with an artsy publisher named Librissime, which was located on Saint-Paul Street in Old Montreal. It was to be a deluxe hardcover book that we agreed to publish in April 2008, to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the band's break-up. That gave me about a year and a half to complete the book. Unfortunately, things did not pan out as some of the members of the band were not ready to open up about events that they still felt were open wounds.

Although Faith No More is my favorite band, most people would probably find it difficult to hear their influence in Vision Eternel's music. It would be absurd of me to state that Vision Eternel sounds anything like Faith No More, but I do take a lot from them, both consciously and sub-consciously. For example, I discovered the eBow through Faith No More (songs like "Midlife Crisis", "Just A Man" and "Stripsearch"). I remember watching a video of Faith No More performing "Midlife Crisis" with Hudson on guitar in July 1997 at the Phoenix Festival in England, and thinking "Wow! What is that!!!" Hudson was using this foreign device that created a harmonic feedback on his guitar, while all this time I had assumed that the sound was made in the studio by Roddy Bottom's keyboards (Martin did not always use the eBow live). I later spotted Hudson also using his eBow when Faith No More performed "Stripsearch" on the French television program Nulle Part Ailleurs in December 1997, and that cinched it for me: I wanted an eBow!

It took me a long time to find one, firstly because not every music store carried one (and online stores were not as common at the time), but also due to its cost. eBows are not as inexpensive as they appear; they cost about as much as a guitar pedal. So I had to save up for it. When I finally purchased one in September 2009, the first thing that I used it on was a Vision Eternel song for Abondance De Périls.

Your releases with Abridged Pause run the gamut in terms of musical styles- what have been the most important ideals you've had for the label? Abridged Pause Recordings started out with much different ideals and plans than what it eventually became. I had previously co-founded another record label, Mortification Records, with two other partners in September 2006. That record label quickly became the home of most of my bands, Vision Eternel, Vision Lunar, Vision Solitude, Soufferance, Gallia Fornax and Throne Of Mortality. In fact, it became principally known for releasing my music digitally. By early 2008, I wanted to form my own record label, but strictly to release music by other artists, and on physical formats. I was adamant that none of my bands would ever be signed to Abridged Pause Recordings, so I kept Mortification Records active in the background to continue releasing my music.

The first two acts signed to Abridged Pause Recordings, in late August 2008, were Dreams Of The Drowned, a post-blackened grind metal project from France, and Black Autumn, an atmospheric/depressive black metal band from Germany. That was the style of music on which I wanted to focus with my new record company. A month later, in September 2008, I also signed the Californian post-rock band Ethereal Beauty, which had planned to release a seven inch vinyl single with Vision Eternel. It was only
through this collaborative release that I consented to adding **Vision Eternel** to Abridged Pause Recordings’ roster, and I was sure that it would be a one-off release.

I later recruited more post-metal, atmospheric black metal, sludge metal, post-rock and avant-garde bands to Abridged Pause Recordings, but I came to realize that I was not helping any of the artists. I certainly meant well, but I was not apt in the world of marketing, networking and promoting. The record label’s releases were not getting the type of exposure they deserved and I felt that I owed it to these great bands not to sell them false promises. And so, I made the decision to narrow the focus of Abridged Pause Recordings towards releasing my own music again. That way, I would be the only party to suffer if a release was overlooked by the press and public. The one band from Abridged Pause Recordings’ former roster that I truly regret not having the opportunity of working further with, is **Black Autumn**. I was supposed to release their album *Aurora* on colored twelve inch vinyl, and I often find myself thinking "If I had the money right now..."

By comparison to Mortification Records, which closed down in late 2008 (and had a brief re-activation in late 2010 for about four months), Abridged Pause Recordings is operated with a professional business structure. It is a legally registered company in Canada, and I have several imprints that handle its various functions. Abridged Pause Publishing is the music and text publishing arm, Abridged Pause Productions handles the video production, Abridged Pause Apparel takes care of merchandising, Abridged Pause Blog is host to the webzine section on the website, and La Detente Studio (formerly Mortified Studios) is both an audio recording studio and a graphic design firm; all of these divisions are under the umbrella of the Abridged Pause Enterprises company. I do not want to give off the impression that I operate a massive corporate structure with its own skyscraper downtown; all of this is very modestly managed through a sole proprietorship, and from a single office in my house. But I do treat it as a business, not a bedroom project.

I love the label’s artwork and logo design, etc., it’s fresh, unique, futuristic, yet undefined—what inspired you to go in this direction for the label (and the band’s) visuals? The visual identification of Abridged Pause Recordings is entirely attributed to my at the time best friend, Jeremy Roux. He was instrumental, in a creative capacity, during the early years of the record label. I had been brainstorming company names for a couple of weeks, and when I finally decided on using Abridged Pause Recordings in mid-February 2008, he immediately offered to design the website and company logo free of charge. I was extremely pleased by his offer because he was a great designer and website builder. I was in awe of his skills and creativity. He had previously helped me with designs for minor projects, but he was mainly a corporate designer. So on one hand, I knew that I was going to receive a polished and professional design from him, and on the other hand, I could feel that he was excited because this was to be his first music-related project, and at the time, we had a pretty similar taste in music.

However, it took him several months to begin working on the designs, and even longer to finish them. That is what ultimately delayed the activities of the record label by eighteen months, and what I feel also hindered the company with a forced "soft launch" through MySpace in August 2009. I would complain about having to wait, but only moderately because he was doing all of it for free, and he was hosting the website on his server, and he had paid for the domain registration. And for all of that I am still grateful.

Roux worked on three different website designs over the years, and I still feel that the first one was the best. The other two slowly chipped away at the company's identification and visual statement, presenting it less and less as a record label, and more as a webzine. That was partly my doing, however, because over time, the Abridged Pause Blog section, where I publish retrospective band and record label interviews and biographies, took up more importance in the company structure. The third and current website design is almost ten years old now, so it is starting to feel old. I wish that the original website design could be re-incorporated, but with updated technology, so that I could have that visual identification again. I miss it terribly.
The original Abridged Pause Recordings design (both the logo and the website) was developed in July 2008. Roux went for a very metal music-oriented theme, with a lot of black, dark blue and grey. The icons and the background were deliberately grungy, but in a fashionable way. For the logo, he mixed up two fonts, Birth Of A Hero and Century Gothic, and accented it by inter-locking the D and P together, and adding SOS in Morse code around the word Abridged. The idea of using the Morse code came to him when he broke down the meaning of the company's name (which I had chosen not for its literal meaning, but only because it sounded good to my ears and was not limiting to a specific genre). He felt that the name should symbolize that the record company is coming to the rescue of bands, to release their music and bridge the gap between artists and fans. I mentioned previously that Roux was a corporate designer, so he found it important to present Abridged Pause Recordings as a business with a slogan and a corporate appeal. Roux was also responsible for some of the early digital flyers to promote the releases, and he would take care of matching up band logos on top of artist pictures for the website.

The second design was made public in January 2012. I have to be honest and admit that I never liked it. It was mainly done to allow for higher resolution images on the website and the ability to embed social media updates and Bandcamp albums. Roux greatly simplified the visual elements and layout with this second design, and I always felt that it was a rush-job. The new background was just grey and black instead of blue, and the layout hardly had any customization. It looked like a Wordpress blog instead of a record label website. That was fine for the landing and news pages, but I hated the way that it made the releases and artists pages look. It never felt right.

Abridged Pause Recordings' third website was designed over a week-end in September 2014. I wish that I could say that it was an exciting experience, but it was not. The second website had always performed badly, so after a couple of years of begging, Roux and I finally set a date to improve it. But I quickly found out that he was not willing to design an all-new website. Instead, he told me to purchase a ready-made Wordpress theme, which he planned to customize. That made things difficult because I wanted the website to showcase the blog section (which had outgrown the record label section in popularity), but I did not want to diminish the bands and releases.

This third design did bring much-needed updates to the layout, such as wider article columns (since my interviews and biographies were lengthy), more room for images, cross-promotion of other blog posts, and most importantly, a responsive mobile theme. However, Roux hardly customized the theme at all. The website was stripped of any visual identity, with the exception of the company logo. There was no background, and the blurred image in the header was a quickly-Photoshopped Soufferance album cover. To be fair, I think that I was content at the time, because the website would serve its purpose, but I was never thrilled.

What's next for Abridged Pause and Vision Eternel? I have been working on two Vision Eternel extended plays during the past two years. The first is completed and pending release, while the second is still under development. The former is a deluxe edition re-issue of Echoes From Forgotten Hearts, which includes the seven songs from the original release, plus sixteen previously-unreleased songs, all re-mastered by Carl Saff, a new artwork by Micheal Koelsch, and a fifty-page booklet recounting in detail the troublesome story of the release, from its conception as a soundtrack to its re-tooling into an extended play, and why it was never properly released. This deluxe edition was scheduled for release in early 2022, but it has been continuously pushed back by the record labels involved, until it was eventually cancelled. I am now in the process of shopping the release to interested record companies, because it is not one which I can manage through Abridged Pause Recordings.

The latter release is Vision Eternel's seventh extended play and follow-up to For Farewell Of Nostalgia. I began documenting song ideas in 2019, during the For Farewell Of Nostalgia studio re-recording session, but I deliberately did not pursue them because I did not want to be distracted from the principal release. I have since recorded demos of additional songs and hope to finally record this extended play this year. I plan to work with Michael Koelsch on the artwork of this one as well.

As for Abridged Pause Recordings, there are no set plans at this time. In the event that I cannot find a
Suitable record label to release Vision Eternel's seventh extended play, I will release it through Abridged Pause Recordings. But I would much prefer to work with another company because dealing with distribution and shipping is extremely difficult when living as a recluse and in a remote area (I live forty-five minutes from the nearest post office).
This is the second part of our in the studio feature with Wicked Maraya. With members spread over New York, Pennsylvania, and Florida it’s great to see the band all together and really enjoying the creative and recording process for their upcoming five song e.p. Even though they had two new songs on the official release of *Lifetime in Hell*, this material is really their proper follow up to their nineties peak. Here’s vocalist Lou Falco to get us updated.

**How did this opportunity to record these new songs come about?** We have always discussed getting together, but the right time hadn’t come around. Recently, Dan has worked with Andy Wallace, mixing *Gojira, Ghost* and *Avenged Sevenfold*. Through casual discussion over these sessions, Wicked Maraya came up several times, and there was a very good response to our material, so we decided now was the right time to bring in some new songs for some of these people to hear and see what happens.

**How did the pre-production work go last month when you came to New York to record?** Pre-production went amazing. I was totally blown away with the material John and Michael had written, and I was very excited to get creative with it. John and I broke down all the lyrics and melodies I had come up with, and we worked every part a few different ways until we were convinced. We hadn’t worked like this in ages, so it was very cool to go old school on this and get back to how it was back in 1994.

**How would you say these new songs compare to the classic Wicked Maraya sound?** We really think these are a new and improved version of our classic sound. We have all the elements of what made our fans like *Cycles* and *Wicked Maraya* in the beginning. There are moody vocals, complex guitar parts, heavy melodic riffs, etc. Personally, I cannot stop listening to the five songs as of today, and we haven’t even finished backing vocals yet. Lyrically it has all the elements of what we do...nothing too direct and lets the listener interpret how they feel.

**I know you didn’t get the proper support for the *Lifetime in Hell* release from 2016, but how did it feel to get that unreleased material officially out to the public?** It was really cool since they had been basically sitting unheard since 1992. We used to distribute the cassette when we played the Sunset Strip back in 1992-1993 while we were looking to get signed. Plus it afforded us the opportunity to record two new songs as of 2015. “Suicidal Dawn” was a true Wicked Maraya vibe and is one of my favorite songs we have ever done. We were very proud to come out with something like that after so long. We hadn’t written a song in seventeen years, so that pretty much kicked ass for us.

**It’s a different world in the music industry these days, in what ways do you see that as a benefit to Wicked Maraya, and in what ways does it hurt your band?** The benefit is that there is now an ‘anything goes’ attitude when it comes to music. So there are really no ‘pigeon holes’ to be put in. Back in the 90’s, when grunge hit, we and many bands of our style were suddenly considered out of style. But today there is so much variety that gets accepted we are very excited about the possibilities in front of us. The slight difference is that it is more difficult to tour due to finances, etc. in certain avenues. So we will see how all of that plays out.

**Having some band members working having careers as music producers is awesome, how will their expertise help get these songs the professional sound to match the quality of the songwriting?** It’s unbelievable. The Studio knowledge that John and Dan have gained is immeasurable. Recording tech-
nique, songwriting and vocal melody ideas, production values, etc. Plus working with other major producers and engineers just adds to the bank of creativity that can be brought into the studio.

You were one of the most talented (and underrated) vocalists in the nineties- you had the distinctiveness of Midnight, the talent of Geoff Tate, with the power of Jon Oliva rolled into one, the new songs sound challenging but your vocals are in prime shape, what’s the secret to maintaining your vocal prowess when most are unable to match what they did almost thirty years ago? Thank you very much for that amazing compliment, mentioning me with those insane vocalists. I will say, that they are true natural singers, while I consider myself more of an entertainer who sings lol. And yes, the new songs are definitely vocally challenging in some aspects as we are trying to keep the classic vibe which had some vocal acrobatics. But I can say that I can still sing all of our material in the original key, and I have really worked on keeping myself in physical, mental and vocal shape. I have never smoked, and I have committed myself in the past several years to keeping my weight down. Plus, living in South Florida, I sing every weekend with my cover band - the Smokin’ Aces, and we play such a wide variety of music that my voice has not had a chance to disappear.

Along the lines of my comparison above, I feel Wicked Maraya appeals to fans of different metal bands, but you’ve had your own style- what do you think makes this band unique? It’s hard to say, but I do feel we throw a bunch of different styles into our music. While I am definitely influenced by many of the singers you mentioned, I don’t feel I necessarily sound like any of them or try to mimic them. It’s strange, because I’m still not even sure why people dig my voice. But our songwriting mixes classic, modern, off the wall stuff. Dan grew up loving Judas Priest, John and Michael love Kiss, and you can hear the guitar solo vibe is more along those lines than say Iron Maiden or Yngwie. We try to make it so that every part of every song is interesting and has enough ear candy so the listener is entertained and engaged. We love to add layers.

You’re getting ready to come up to Pennsylvania to officially record these songs, how are you feeling and what do you hope to accomplish? Well since I’m a few days behind on getting to the final questions, we are now in the middle of recording. We are blown away by what we are creating and hope that those who were interested are pleased with what they hear, and then who knows where we go. We would love to go out and tour, do some of the killer festivals in the U.S. and Europe. It’s been quite a while since Wicked Maraya has done that and we are ready to do it.

Final comments? On behalf of Wicked Maraya, we want to say thank you to you Brett for giving us the opportunity for this interview. You are the first one who jumped on this and we greatly appreciate it. And of course, thank you to all of our fans who have continued to support us over these past years, and we really look forward to everyone hearing the five new song. We have posted a few clips here and there on our Facebook Page - www.Facebook.com/Wicked-Maraya and also our Instagram. We will keep updating our social media more and more.
Greek extreme metalers Wothrosch released one of the best debuts I’ve heard in a while. *Odium* is intricate, brutal, and expansive. As the band makes a name for themselves we set out to find out more about the Wothrosch collective.

*Odium* is out and getting rave reviews- how do you feel about how the album came out and the reaction thus far? We are extremely proud with how the album turned out. *Odium* has been a project in the works for over two years and to see our efforts finally coming to fruition in such a way, is very rewarding for us. The reaction so far, has been really good and beyond any of our expectations. It’s great to know that this album has resonated with listeners around the world and we are humbled by their response to it.

What makes Wothrosch a "collective"? The reason why we consider ourselves to be a collective, is because we have always believed that Wothrosch and its message is best communicated and fortified via multiple and different art mediums. Hence why, we like to collaborate with artists outside of the music world, like Maxime Taccardi. We are inspired by the German philosopher, Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff and his concept of “Gesamtkunstwerk”. “Gesamtkunstwerk” which translates as “total artwork”, is a work of art that makes use of all or many art forms.

I was not surprised by the list of five albums (by Behemoth, Septicflesh, Celtic Frost, Nile, and Anaal Nathrakh) - how would you describe your music and the essence of Wothrosch? Our music is dark and while we don’t adhere to the idea of genre categorizations, we definitely draw inspiration from different types of extreme music such as black, death and doom metal. If we could place a label on our music, it would be that of “extreme metal”, because in our eyes it encapsulates the essence of the art that we wish to create and put forward.

I see that all proceeds are being donated to Turkey and Syria following the horrific earthquakes, it's great to see your band step up for people who are really in need. What is happening in these countries right now is an absolute tragedy. There are hardly any words that can sufficiently describe the pain and loss, to donate some of the proceeds from the digital album sales of *Odium* was the least we could do in order to help.

How was your meeting with Maxime Taccardi and how did the project go? Working with such an esteemed artist like Maxime Taccardi was an honor. His radical form of art resonates deeply with us and it also aligns with our own artistic vision and aesthetics. The project was entitled “Sanguis” and it depicted our logo, the foundation and core of our visual identity, painted with Maxime’s blood.

You've already garnered a lot of positive attention from bands like Septicflesh and Kvarforth from Shining who was in your "Mass" video, how have these people and bands had an effect on the Wothrosch collective? Collaborating with renowned artists like Niklas Kvarforth from Shining and Seth Siro Anton from Septicflesh is a great privilege and a dream come true. It is not only an honor, as well as, a validation for us to host and exhibit a piece their art on our own, it is moreover an opportunity for us, to learn and to hone our craft further by observing the professional manner in which these great artists work.

How do you see the band evolving and what does the future hold for the collective? We are grateful and humbled. Over the next period, we are going to be preparing for the second Wothrosch album. We want to make sure that we don’t simply deliver an *Odium* part 2. We want to create something even bigger, more grandiose and to keep evolving, our sound and our image as much as possible. Ultimately, it is our goal to see our Collective grow as much as possible. After all, anything that stands still, is condemned to wither and die. From the bottom of our darkest hearts, we wish to extend to every single one of you, our gratitude and utmost appreciation, for the reaction and reception to our debut offering, *Odium*. Thank you all for your support and let it be known... Wothrosch has only just begun. Welcome to our world. You have been warned.
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OUT NOW ON ALL PLATFORMS
Wounds Of Recollection is an Atlanta based solo project with ten full length releases already. Annos has developed his music from a more primitive extreme black metal into an incredibly emotionally and musically diverse entity it is today.

**How do you feel about Warm Glow of the End of Everything? Are you satisfied with the result and do you think this is your best album yet?** I’m very proud of how *Warm Glow of the End of Everything* turned out. I had big plans for it from the start, and I think I accomplished most of what I set out to do. I think my production quality took a big step in the right direction too, which I am also very proud of. It’s my best work to date, but there is absolutely still room to improve in just about every aspect.

**Very rarely do we see a band mature to such an extreme as Wounds Of Recollection has, from your early primitive sounding days to the emotionally intricate and expansive universe of sound you’re creating now- what do you think were the key elements to developing your sound?** To me, the key has been challenging myself to improve with every release. The truth is that I started this project when I was fourteen years old with absolutely no experience in writing or recording music. I am a lifelong learner when it comes to songwriting and production. This is a large part of why I’ve managed to stick with the same project that I created as a teenager for nine years and ten albums. I will keep making *Wounds of Recollection* music for as long as I feel like I can one-up myself on the next release, which I don’t see ceasing to be the case anytime soon.

**The lyrics are very haunting and dark, this “end to everything”- do you see this has a finality or as an end to a particular era of life?** I’m glad you asked this, because there absolutely is a personal meaning behind this, and it all connects to two past releases. Strap in; this might be a longer than expected answer. My music has always revolved around each era of my life. I am a very anxious person and my biggest, most existential fear is leaving behind a happier life forever in the past. “You Were a Garden of Empyrean Light” was written when I was 19 and a recent high school graduate who moved far away from my hometown for college. I was struggling with accepting that the life I had was gone and was terrified of adulthood. “No-where Else Feels More Like Home” was written when I was 20 and transferring to a different college; leaving behind the life I started to feel comfortable in and having to start over - again. The “home” in the title of this album represents childhood memories that were growing more distant every day (or more literally, my childhood home and all the memories associated with it). “I am a weeping man… holding onto what strands of happiness I find in a dimming haven of childhood memories.” (from *Dedicated to Sandy Denny*). I hated the college town I found myself in at this point in my life. I felt dreadfully alone and out of place and wanted nothing more than to return to life as it was when I was a kid.

“Warm Glow of the End of Everything,” was written when I was 22. After years of struggling and frequent lonely days, I found the circle of people that I knew could be lifelong friends. But of course, as soon as I made friends in college, we all graduated and began moving far away from each other for jobs and such. After conquering my loneliness, it felt like the comfortable life I had was being stripped from me again. But this time, I felt more prepared and confident that I could handle it and that I would find my comfort again in whatever life has to throw at me next. This is where the “Warm Glow” of “the End of Everything” comes into play.

**The album cover is remarkable and unexpected for an album that is this extreme, what does it represent in terms of the lyrical connection?** The album cover is a photograph of an empty classroom. There isn’t any significant meaning other than it felt really nostalgic but also somewhat eerie to look at. It can also connect to the college experience I described in the last question, but really it was inspired by other liminal art. At the time I was writing the album, I was very interested in the concepts of liminal spaces (much of the ambient and synthwave parts of the album were directly inspired by Kane Pixel’s *Backrooms* series on YouTube). Liminality has multiple meanings, but the one this album focuses on is liminality as a transitional space or time between two states of being. I feel like I am constantly in between two stages of my life - forever unable to just enjoy the moment because I’m always looking in the past when life was more simple or ahead to when the moment is gone.
The ebb and flow from quiet, introspective moments to the more extreme and fast paced music flows naturally and seemingly with ease, but how difficult is it to create and write these epic, musically varied songs? My goal with this album was to create an engaging experience throughout the entire runtime. I felt I had made the mistake of droning on with one dimensional ideas in past releases, i.e. parts of the album that overstay their welcome and cause listeners to lose interest. There isn’t really a formula I have to flowing contrasting sections of a song together, but rather just doing what feels the most natural. Giving each loud and heavy part some time to breathe with softer ambient parts is what I have learned is key, however.

Do you ever want to have a live band to play shows, or do you view this as a solo project? I don’t think Wounds of Recollection will ever play live. It’s been just me since the project’s inception in 2014. But I don’t view this negatively. This project has always just been about being a creative outlet for personal expression. Outside of my music, I have a pretty normal life - a full-time job, a long-time romantic partner, pets, friends, other hobbies, etc. Even though Wounds of Recollection has always been closely associated with things about my life, it will never really be my life. I am also very introverted and have significant stage fright, so playing on a stage is horrifying to me.

I like the extreme vocals, but also feel the clearer vocals work well too, how important are the extreme vocals to Wounds Of Recollection and do you see more clearer vocals being used in the future as well? Thank you. I felt like I was taking a risk in changing up some aspects of the vocals on this album but the response to the clean vocals has all been positive. I had been wanting to include cleanly sung vocals in my music for a very long time but never did because of one very important reason - I suck at singing. It took many years and a lot of self-discovery to find out what few things my voice can do well and now I am comfortable enough to include clean vocals as another tool at my disposal to create the songs I want to create. Worry not, however - I don’t ever plan to go full Infinite Granite. I like making heavy music with a lot of screaming. It’s very cathartic to scream about the things bothering you in life, ya’ know.

What are some difficulties you face being a solo and independent artist and trying to get your music to the masses? To me, the biggest difficulty in being solo artist is having no one to provide quality assurance in my songwriting. I have a small circle of friends in the scene whom I frequently ask for feedback on mixes and concepts. However, there are plenty of moments in my music that I look back on and wish I had someone to tell me to do something different - like parts that drone on for too long, lyrics that could have been better, etc. Not having someone to tell me (like a bandmate) when an idea is a bad idea has always been a limitation for me creatively.

In terms of getting my music to the masses, I do find myself struggling to know how to best promote my music. I’ve used social media, mass emails, connecting with other artists in the scene to try and gather an audience to only minimal success. But to me, that part isn’t that important. I just want to challenge myself to make better music with each release, and to me, that brings more satisfaction than any statistic on a streaming service.

What are your plans for the rest of this year? There are three Wounds of Recollection songs left to be released this year. As of the time of writing this, the release dates are TBD, so I can’t give too many details yet. But these songs are not B-sides or left-overs from “Warm Glow”. They all had a purpose and I’m incredibly proud of them. One of the unreleased tracks is a strong candidate for my favorite song releasing in 2023 and features some unexpected guest vocalists. Another sounds absolutely nothing like anything I’ve ever released before as Wounds of Recollection and will likely be the only Wounds song ever with exclusively clean vocals. There’s also another secret project I’ve been working on for two years now, but never finishing because I want it to be perfect. And I feel like I’m getting much closer to that point. Early 2024 is my goal for that project.

Any final comments? To everyone who has reached out to me or supported my music in any way, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. It’s because of your support that I can continue to improve and invest in my art. Y’all are awesome.
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